

The Fossicker

By Ernest Glanville



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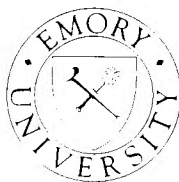
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THE FOSSICKER

A Romance of Mashonaland

BY
ERNEST GLANVILLE

AUTHOR OF "THE LOST HEIRESS," ETC.



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CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE BELLS OF SHANDON	1
II. THE TREASURE	9
III. FOSTER IS CURIOUS	24
IV. AT CAPETOWN	28
V. PLATTE KLIP	35
VI. A FIGHT IN THE DARK	45
VII. NO. 46	53
VIII. THE "DUTCH" MAID OF ATHENS	58
IX. A FOUL BLOW	66
X. THE "FRIENDLY" BALL	71
XI. THE CONEY HUNTER	82
XII. HE IS THE MAN!	92
XIII. KISS ME!	103
XIV. ON THE TRACK	114
XV. DEAD MAN'S CREEK	122
XVI. DRURY IS MISSING	134

CHAP.	PAGE
XVII. THE FATE OF THE DRIVER .	145
XVIII. TREK BOERS . .	155
XIX. A FATAL STRUGGLE . . .	165
XX. THE FLIGHT OF LOCUSTS . . .	176
XXI. THE BATTLE . . .	186
XXII. A MYSTERIOUS SIGHT . . .	205
XXIII. IN A MAZE . . .	214
XXIV. THE MOUNDS OF IVORY . . .	224
XXV. FOUND !- . . .	232
XXVI. THE FOSSICKER	246
XXVII. THE HOMESTEAD	259
XXVIII. DRURY'S STORY . . .	272
XXIX. IN KIMBERLEY	285
XXX. A PLOT REVEALED	298
XXXI. A CONFESSION	307
XXXII. OVER THE BRIDGE	311
XXXIII. JOY IN THE MORNING	318

THE FOSSICKER.

CHAPTER I.

THE BELLS OF SHANDON.

Two men were pacing the promenade deck of the U.S. Mexican—outward bound for Capetown—one smoking, the other talking lazily to pass the time.

“An ocean passenger steamer,” he was saying, “is a world in itself, more or less bilious according to the weather, but still a pocket edition of what is known as the world—a collection of people divided into classes by an unwritten code. An ocean steamer, with its skipper, crew, and passengers, brings the world into a focus, and it’s rather a commonplace affair when submitted to observation. A drop of dirty water taken from a roadside pond and placed under a microscope, reveals an animated scene of life, in which each minute ruffian is trying to devour the other. That sort of thing has been going on ever since the earth’s crust was watertight—and, upon my word, this world is like a drop of dirty water ! ”

“That is one drop too much—if you must talk, please try to talk sense.”

“We have been four days out, and already we have all

the distinctions to be met with between Kensington and Whitechapel. The saloon is the West End, the fo'castle is beyond Aldgate Pump, the chosen few at the captain's table have been presented at Court, those who sun themselves in the smiles of the doctor are trying to get into society; two young women are in deadly rivalry for the position of fashionable beauty, and the married ladies reserve their fascinations for every one but their husbands, who play nap and speculate on the ship's run. We've a stockbroker who discusses shares, a company promoter who exchanges a mile of quartz in the Transvaal with a few ounces of gold in it for a hundred thousand of specie in London ready coined for use, and "——

"And a cynic who would be a philosopher, and cannot for lack of something—brains, I suppose."

"Exactly; and to complete the summary, there are two fools bound on a wild-goose chase, myself the greater, we will say, and you, Drury, the less; and already you have been marked down as a prey by one of those carnivorous animals we found in the water drop."

"Bless my soul!" said Drury, with an affectation of alarm, "you don't mean to say there is something dangerous aboard. Will he bite?"

"Seriously, Dick—weren't you too confidential with that man Foster?"

"Well, I don't know; I certainly did tell him that we were bound for Ophir, and as he was so deeply interested in the ancient history of Mashonaland, I gave him the latitude of that fabulous mine. The longitude I had clean forgotten."

"You are indeed a flat!"

"Nonsense! What's he to Ophir, or Ophir to him, without the plan?"

"Dick, you certainly should be in leading-strings."

"Ah, well, Smedley, you know I could not have undertaken this business unless you came, and as you are here, it is well your responsibilities should begin."

Smedley laughed at the easy manner in which Drury had with a sweep of his hand transferred a burden to the shoulders of one not directly concerned in them, but there was nothing bitter in his mirth. Yet, as the laugh died, his face grew grave—a look habitual with him, one would say.

They paced to and fro for some time in silence—Drury with his head well up, and his sunny blue eyes glancing, always with a smile in them, to where a lady in white lounged gracefully in a cane chair. He was a fair, handsome young fellow, frank and open, with a steely look, however, in his eyes, that told of a temper not all sunshine. He walked with an easy roll and swing, not ungraceful, which he had caught from the officers of a cavalry regiment stationed in Exeter. His parents had died when he was young, he had spent his youth as best pleased him, in all manner of healthy sport, having early got out of the control of his guardian, a conscientious but very nervous old gentleman, and his early manhood he had devoted to travel. He had met Frank Smedley in Canada, and there the two had at once recognized each other as fitted by circumstance for friendship.

Smedley, too, was a lonely man, but he felt his loneliness the more, for his father had not long been dead, and he had come to learn how much he had missed by

foregoing, when he had the opportunity, the companionship of his father. The memory of his father's death stayed with him always, for it was all too late when he appreciated how that silent and reserved man had missed and mourned for some semblance of friendship, some show of interest on the part of his son. He remembered with regret the many solitary walks the old man would take over the wide moor, and he recalled the hesitation at the door, the wistful glance—signs he now knew of a wished-for companionship. And all the time he had thought the dark, sorrow-laden man proud and absorbed.

He too had been accounted proud and reserved. At College, no man had called him friend; and although he was at heart eager for friendship, he had not sufficient geniality to overcome the barriers set up by his grave looks and formal manners. So he had gone through his term, doing fairly well without much effort, and had left, without much regret, to wander aimlessly about the earth, like many other Englishmen, seeing much, daring much, yet doing nothing of any consequence to themselves or any one else.

Like Drury, too, he was Devonshire by birth, but he was dark, all trace of colour having been burnt out of his cheeks by tropical suns. A broad line across his forehead, and a few white hairs in his black moustache, with the fixed set of his mouth, gave him a look of sternness—a look which his clear brown eyes partly relieved.

These two had been living together at The Pines, on the hills above Exeter, where Drury held loose hold of a vanishing estate, and Smedley had become acquainted with the lady to whom his friend was engaged to be

married—Miss Elton, daughter of the old vicar of a neighbouring parish—and he had also often talked with Drury over the latter's narrowing finances. When a chance, slight and shadowy, but very alluring, of making a fortune presented itself, the two friends had seized upon it.

"By Jove! she sleeps, my darling sleeps!" said Drury, suddenly.

Smedley looked up vaguely, suspecting his friend was quoting a snatch of song; but there was something more than the refrain of a song in Drury's mind. He had started forward towards the lady in white, who, to all appearance, was sound asleep. One rounded arm, plainly revealed by the lace-work sleeves, dropped nervelessly to the deck; the other was thrown back and bent, with the hand at the back of the head; and the head was slightly inclined towards the young men. The full red lips were parted, showing a gleaming line of white, and the long dark eye-lashes fell upon the cheek, making an arc of black on the fair surface. The figure was thrown out by the position of the arms—a vision altogether seductive, voluptuous, and dangerous.

Smedley laid a restraining hand upon his companion's arm. "Now, Dick," he said, laughingly, "don't do anything foolish."

"Foolish, man! do you call winning a pair of gloves from such a pair of lips foolishness?"

"Yes, I do," said Smedley, with earnestness. "Only four days ago you said good-bye to Miss Elton at Plymouth, and the memory of that parting with the sweetest girl on earth should keep you from dangerous familiarities with an adventuress."

Drury flushed, and looked his friend hard in the eyes. "Look here, Frank," he broke out, "I honour you as a friend, but understand, my love affairs are my own." He strode quickly off, with the hot colour still in his cheeks.

"His 'love affairs' !—he talks like a *roué*, or a Mormon bishop, doesn't he now, Mr. Smeddle?"

These words, drawled out in a soft and melodious voice, came from the sleeping beauty.

"I beg your pardon, Miss de Beer," stammered Smedley, as he recognized that she had heard everything.

"The adventuress!" she drawled, with a smile, as though she enjoyed his discomfiture.

"I thought you were asleep," he said, lamely.

"No matter. Besides, I could have warned you—but I preferred to listen, and you know listeners seldom hear of anything to their credit. Now, tell me," she added, after arranging herself comfortably in her chair, "why am I an adventuress?"

"Really, madam," he began, then stopped. She was looking out to sea through half-closed eyes, and her face had all the seeming of one expecting a pleasant communication. Yet he knew that at heart she was on fire at the epithet that had slipped from his lips, and he was in want of words to frame a suitable apology.

"Come, sir, be frank. A man who can be outspoken behind a woman's back should be plain-spoken in her presence, or—I will set the example of being frank—he is no gentleman. If you were acquainted with feminine coquetry, you might retort that a lady who feigns sleep in order to attract admiration, but receives detraction instead, is well paid out."

"Miss de Beer, I hold my friend's happiness very dear; and in my anxiety for him and others I spoke, perhaps, hastily. I am very sorry—indeed I am," he added, with a faint smile, as she raised her eyebrows.

"Ah! you men are selfish to the core. You are anxious about a strong young fellow like that, and you throw a stone at a weak woman without caring whether you bruise her or not. It is not fair, Mr. Meddle."

"Smedley, Miss de Beer. Yet, pardon me, you appear to be quite unruffled, and I may hope you will forgive my rudeness."

She looked up into his face, which expressed his regret more than his words, and he noticed for the first time how expressive of alert intelligence were her eyes. She looked down and sighed. "You will be a good friend. Drury is lucky. Ah, yes! I forgive you. A friend is better than a lover, for love is a flower that blooms in the night, and withers in the morning, while friendship strikes deep and grows strongly. Tell me," she said, waking from a reverie into which she had fallen, while Smedley stood by tugging at his moustache and wondering whether this fair woman was making sport of him or not, "why do you concern yourself about Mr. Drury's 'love affairs,' as he sweepingly called them just now?"

"That is a matter I cannot discuss," he returned, gravely.

"Very well then, we will not discuss it now; but," she continued, with a soft smile and a flash in her eyes, "we certainly shall return to it another time. You mentioned the name of a lady, I think."

"I did."

"It appeared familiar to me, though I did not quite catch it. Will you kindly repeat?"

"There is no necessity to repeat her name, Miss de Beer; and as the subject must be unpleasant to you, let us drop Drury."

"No, pray don't—it might hurt him. Yet you know that name runs in my head. Elton, I think it was. I knew some one of that name once, a diamond digger. Poor fellow!—ah, poor fellow! he would have been glad for a friend like you, Mr. Smedley; but, forgive me, you cannot be interested in him." She looked up at him quietly, his face was alive with eager desire.

"Yes," he said, with emotion, "Elton was the name. When did you last hear of this diamond digger? Can you recall his Christian name?"

"Really, Mr. Smedley," she said, "it is so long since, I cannot remember. Moreover, you cannot reasonably expect me to be confidential while you remain close as a clasped knife. There is the dressing-bell, and an adventuress, beyond other women, must dress well."

She rose, made him a sweeping curtsy, and went off humming these catching lines—

"The bells of Shandon,
They sound so grand on
The pleasant waters of the River Lee."

"The very words he liked so well," muttered Smedley, looking after her with a troubled brow. "Of course she knows him, poor Owen."

CHAPTER II.

THE TREASURE.

THE steamer kept on its course with a directness as though the track had been marked out, and following almost in the vanished wake of its former voyages, its outwater projecting like the jaw of a bulldog, and about its iron bulk a general air of decision.

If an ocean steamer is of the feminine gender, it is a "she" of the severe order, with no more resemblance to a full-rigged ship in all her beauty of flowing lines, tapering masts, and billowy canvas than a bespectacled and manly spinster bears to the gracious beauty of a young girl. The red funnel discharged volumes of smoke, which trailed away—a long smudgy track between sea and sky—while over the water stretched a sinuous path of gleaming foam from the stern right away into the haze of the horizon. The thirsting ventilators, with mouths always agape to the breeze, diverted some of its freshness to the engineers, who panted and steamed in a moving purgatory, where they ministered to the great heart of the steamer, whose pulsations could be felt from bow to stern. That mass of steel, with its delicate mechanism and mighty arms of brightened metal fretting under the power of steam, required perpetual control, lest it should fly to pieces in one mad effort, or become utterly impotent.

There lies the difference between divine creation and the invention of human intelligence. That which is created moves on of its own inherent force, while that which is invented requires continual care.

The steamer soon entered into the sultry seas. The pitch between the white boards became soft, and gave out an odour of tar, which freely mingled with the warm air from the engine-room and the smell of continual cooking.

The passengers were limp, and sweltered in their own juice. Their arms hung loosely from the shoulders, and their legs, when they did lazily walk, dragged listlessly. Some sat for coolness on the grating about the steering-wheel, others sprawled over Madeira chairs, and a few, whose energy had not altogether been soddened, lounged against the gritty bulwarks and watched a schooner which lay becalmed on the oily waters. Her crew rose up one by one from the nooks and shady places where they had been cooling off, and leant over the ship's side. So the two companies looked across at one another, glad to have something of human interest to ponder upon, yet not caring enough to stir a hand or wave a cap in token of good fellowship. No doubt the schooner's people made a few slow remarks about the uselessness of hurry and the degrading effects of steam before crawling back to the shade, and the steamer's passengers pitied the others for their hopeless stagnation.

When the ship had faded away into an indistinct blur on the horizon, a fresh point of interest was found far ahead in the form of a whale. His jet had caught the eye of a watchful quartermaster, and soon all were anxiously watching for the tiny gleam of white, the only indication yet that there was a whale within that vast circle of dreary water.

"There's only one of 'em," said the quartermaster, a fine old Naval Reserve man, with bronzed face, out of

which peered the simplest, keenest eyes, "and he's on a voyage."

Gradually the steamer overhauled the great fish, and the columns of spray regularly ejected grew taller. At last his great head appeared black on the indigo water, then the shining back with colonies of barnacles thereon, their nets spread to sweep the waters for food, and each one of them carelessly indifferent to the duration of the voyage, or to the whereabouts of their destination. Their struggle for life had ended when they secured a firm foothold on the broad sides of the whale, and now they were in office they did not care a fig what happened. The whale himself forged steadily on, the foam rolling from his square head, two ridges of water breaking away from his shoulders and spreading, fan-like, in his wake, while the beat of his great flukes set the water boiling and hissing astern. Unheeding the vessel, he kept on, and as he fell astern the passengers turned their faces with a feeling of wonderment as to the purpose of his going.

"He looks as though he had an appointment somewhere," said Miss de Beer.

"Maybe, miss, he has a wife waiting for him off Tristan da Cuna."

"Yes, but that is thousands of miles away. How will he find his way? It is so strange—he has no compass, cannot take the sun at noon, nor study a chart."

"I'm not so sartin of that, lady. Maybe he carries a compass and a chart too in that big head of his. I dunno how he can steer a straight course, for there are no signs about to guide him, an' the currents run anyhow. Put a man down in a flat, with the horizon round like the brim

of a hat, 'thout a stump or a stone, or aught else to steer by, and sooner or later he'll turn on his course. Now, how can a whale—which has not men's knowledge—keep a-going straight forward for a thousand or six thousand knots if he hasn't somewhat to steer by? What I do think, miss and gentlemen, is that human folks ain't got all the knowledge that was given out, not by a long way."

"Was a sailor there on that occasion, quartermaster?" asked Drury, with something that may have been a wink.

"If there had been, Mr. Drury, sir, he would have kept quiet and not exposed his ignorance. Can you tell me how a salmon finds his way back to the very identical pool in the river where he was spawned after he has been knocking about in the salt water for months?"

"Of course I can, quartermaster. He finds his way up by hook or by crook, and by rod and line."

The old sailor looked at Drury questioningly—"I s'pose that's a joke, but blow me if I can see the point!"

"I don't wonder—the point being in the fish's mouth."

The quartermaster went off, chuckling and shaking his head; then he paused, turned round, and remarked aloud for the benefit of the laughing company, "Whales, I reckon, are too mighty sensible to joke."

The luncheon bell—pleasantest sound aboard—summoned the passengers into the saloon, where they fired themselves with the hottest curry, for an excuse to quench the flames throughout the afternoon with lemon squash imbibed leisurely through straws.

In the afternoon, Smedley found out a deserted part of

the ship, and spreading out a map over his knees, busied himself marking off points with a pencil, varying his work by occasional references to an old manuscript.

By and by his eye travelled from the map to the deck, and he became aware from the shadow on the boards that some one was behind him. On looking round, he found a passenger named Foster, for whom he had an instinctive repugnance, standing on the skylight, in such a position that, had he chosen, he could easily have overlooked the map and manuscript. His eyes were listlessly fixed on the sea, and, noticing Smedley move, he appeared surprised at his vicinity.

"Ah! Mr. Smedley, I did not see you. Studying geography?"

"Yes," replied the other, curtly.

"I remember now—your friend Drury told me you were going in search of Mauchberg, or Ophir, or some such place where gold is to be found in bucketsful."

"Ah! he was probably romancing."

"Very likely," said Foster, with a dry smile; "nevertheless, there are treasures of some sort to be found there, left probably by the old Phœnicians. I must confess I like luxury too much to become a treasure-hunter." Suiting the action to the word, he took a seat next to Smedley, and stretched out his legs.

"I did meet a man in Kimberley who had been up in the Mashona country. It was understood that he had discovered a store of gold near one of those old ruins to be found up there, but he kept his secret. At my suggestion, he drew up a plan of the place, with description of the route to be followed, but he lost the paper. He

disappeared—died from drink, I think—and of course his secret died with him.” He spoke carelessly, but his small black eyes were eagerly fixed on the manuscript which Smedley rolled and unrolled impatiently.

“Did you credit his story?” asked Smedley, taking a mental note of his eager look.

“Oh dear no! I regarded the whole story as a delusion. May I glance a moment at your map—perhaps I can locate this romance approximately? Thanks; let me see.” He ran his eye rapidly over the pencilled course marked out, and placed his finger on a red star, from which he traced the latitude and longitude—20 degs., 32 degs.

“It was about here,” he said, indicating a spot about ten degrees to the west of the red star. “’Gad! all the wealth of Solomon would not tempt me into that savage country.”

“How do you know the paper you spoke of was lost?”

“I do not know, as the lawyers say, of my own knowledge. For all I know to the contrary, the paper you hold in your hand may be the same. But after he got into trouble his effects were searched and no paper was found. I happen to know from a detective who searched him that the paper was not on his person.”

“He got into trouble?” said Smedley, vaguely.

“Yes, like many better men, he fell a victim to women and illicit diamond buying. His name was Webster,” he added.

“Ah! did you ever meet a man named Elton at Kimberley?”

“Elton? the name seems familiar. About what year would he have been at the mine?”

"It is four years since his friends last heard of him—and then only through rumours which connected his name with an illicit diamond buyer, an utter scoundrel, I believe."

Foster covered his mouth to hide a smile of triumph. Then he continued in a smooth voice—"No, I cannot recall the circumstance; and—pardon me for saying so—it is not likely that I should have had any knowledge of a man connected with the I.D.B. gang. Those people are the pariahs of the mine. I presume this man Elton was no friend of yours?"

"I regret to say he was not," said Smedley, eyeing the other sternly; "but I hope to gain his friendship."

Foster bowed with mock politeness, and went off, humming, with a look of great satisfaction on his cunning features.

Smedley stroked his moustache savagely. He resented the tone adopted by Foster, as well as the latter's manner of calmly appropriating his map. "That was a pretty shrewd guess of his about the nature of this manuscript, and I wonder whether he has made up that story about Webster from what he must have gathered from Drury. Confound Dick! there he is flirting with Miss de Beer worse than ever."

He watched the two grimly, noting the wiles of the coquette—how she used an effective armament of languishing glances and seductive smiles upon him, winning his admiration, and how she flattered him by indications of a clinging dependence upon his judgment.

"It's positively sickening!" he growled; "he has a heart like a sponge. If she does squeeze it, it may not

affect him much ; but I suppose I must interfere." He paced up and down the deck altogether oblivious to the soft glances of one of the rival beauties, who, failing the first officer—absent on duty—required another devoted swain.

"It must be stopped," he said for the twentieth time ; and then, with the determined resolution of a man going to have a tooth out, he strode up to the gay couple.

"Here comes the ghost of Hamlet's father!" cried Drury, with mock heroics ; "mark his lowering brow."

"Well," she said, turning her head and regarding Smedley critically, "he has to me more the aspect of a school-master bent on chastising an unruly child."

"Can you spare Mr. Drury a few minutes, Miss de Beer?" he said, stiffly.

"I told you. Promise not to punish the dear boy too severely—besides, his cries might disturb the ship."

"I won't treat him with more severity than he deserves; but you know he is—ah!—neglecting his diary."

Miss de Beer laughed merrily at this. "Well," she said, "a diary is certainly a serious matter ; and if you remain to amuse me I will endeavour to get on without his presence."

"Thank you," said Drury ; "but you are not going to get rid of me on a pretext of that sort. Besides, you and Smedley don't agree, and it would not be safe to leave you together."

"Never mind, my dear boy ; go and write in your diary about me."

Thus pleasantly dismissed, Drury went off, not to jot down how many chops he had eaten for breakfast, but to

confide to the doctor that Smedley had gone queer in the head.

"I think, Mr. Smedley," said Miss de Beer, with a malicious smile, "you have come to give me the information you withheld a few days since?"

"Yes; I think the time has arrived."

"Well, you know that is an indirect compliment to me, for it clearly shows my powers of attraction are not weak—a consolation to an adventuress, naturally." She looked up at him with a face as frank as a child's, and an innocent look in her large eyes.

Smedley smiled. "I must admit you are dangerous; and I do not know, I am sure, whether I should grudge Drury the fatal pleasure of singeing his wings. Not for his sake, but for the happiness of others, do I interfere."

She sighed and looked away, and there was something wistful in the glance. Smedley hesitated a while, for though he did his duty relentlessly, he dreaded giving pain.

"I hope you will not think me impertinent," he said.

"I am hardened to impertinences, Mr. Smedley," she said, with a hard laugh. "I am one of those unfortunate women whom men treat as kindred spirits—and a 'jolly good fellow' in a gown becomes, all too soon, the victim and sport of familiarity. Pray, go on."

He began his story gravely, and went through it with some show of emotion, which communicated itself to his listener.

He told how he and Drury had spent many days on Dartmoor, where they had seen much of the Rev. John Elton and his daughter Olive—how they had first learnt to respect the old man and to sympathize with him in a sorrow

that was visibly shortening his days. His son Owen had left for the Cape five years ago. Every week after his arrival at Capetown the mail steamer had brought over a bright letter, which Miss Olive had called for at the distant post-office, and as regularly read to her father in the room overlooking the long stretch of road, connected indelibly in his mind with the last appearance of his son.

At the end of the first year's absence the letters ceased, and not a word had they since heard of the boy. But still, on every Tuesday in the week, through every week in the four years, Olive had driven to the post-office, and as the day came round the white-haired old man had stood at the window watching his daughter, and was there waiting her return, to receive always the same mute caress that told of disappointment. A brave girl she was, with a smile and a hopeful word for that pathetic figure of waiting age, while never to herself acknowledging the despair which grew in her own heart. To others who had eyes to note, her sorrow was revealed in the wistful look in her large grey eyes, and in the pale beauty of her grave face.

Mr. Elton was attracted early by the sunshiny gaiety of Drury; he liked to see him going with Olive to the post, and liked to hear his cheery words of hope.

It was impossible for Drury to take those long walks to the village without falling in love, and one day he said, with a glow of enthusiasm, that he would set out in search for Owen, and asked her to give him a right to look for the absent as for a brother. She told her father, making most of the suggested search, and he gave his blessing to Drury, and was thereafter eager that the search should begin without delay. "She will wait for you,

Richard ; and you know," he added, with a tearful humour, "the sooner you come back with Owen, the sooner you will have her."

Smedley had taken it for granted he was to join in the search. In fact, though he did not say so, it appeared that he saw to everything, went over Owen's letters, mapped out a plan of operations, and made all the arrangements for the voyage ; while Drury devoted himself to Olive, or chatted with the Vicar.

Occasionally Olive would get away, and showed an intelligent interest in Smedley's plans. One day she gave into his hand a roll of manuscript which had been enclosed in Owen's last letter.

"He gave that to me, and said it might bring me a fortune one day ; and although there may be no truth in the story set forth, yet you know there may, and sometimes I think it is true."

"What am I to do with it ?"

"Read it first."

He did, and found that the manuscript purported to be the story of a traveller who had found near some ancient ruins in Mashonaland a hidden treasure of vast wealth. The locality was fixed at a distance of twenty miles due west of Mount Macomwe.

"That will be about 32 degs. by 19.4, as you will see by the map," and Miss Olive indicated the spot by making a star in red ink. "I have been quite interested in my efforts to fix the spot, and was much aided by an old friend of father's, Mr. Thompson, who has travelled about that part. He strongly believed that the ruins discovered by Herr Mauch were built originally by the Phœnicians."

"I must confess, Miss Olive, I did not know of the existence of any ruins in that presumably savage country. Do you wish us to make search for the treasure?"

"Mr. Smedley, I have a strong belief that Owen has gone into that wild country, and in case you find no trace of him in the Colony, I thought it best that you should know of this."

"Certainly, Miss Elton; you have every ground to think so—that will explain why it is you have not heard, for there can be no post in a barbarous country, and as the means of transport must be primitive, he would naturally be a long time on the march."

"Oh, thank you for saying so much! Mr. Drury rather laughed at the story of the treasure."

"Dick may laugh now, but he will be the first to urge the trip north if we are unfortunate enough not to find your brother in the Colony."

"I hope you will not go," she said, with a faint colour in her cheeks, "if you find that the country is not safe. Mr. Thompson told me that it was surrounded by two fierce Zulu tribes."

"Ah! we will not heedlessly run into danger; and, moreover, if Herr Mauch visited the country, why should not we?"

So that matter was settled. Smedley did not add that whether Owen was found in the Colony or not, he himself was determined to investigate the story of the treasure.

Mr. Elton on the day of the departure had made one solemn assertion—"I will wait for my son one year from to-day; if he comes not then—God's will be done: we will meet on earth no more."

Miss Elton had accompanied them to Plymouth, and

when she had said good-bye, she had repeated her belief that her brother would be found in the interior.

"Yes; and what did you say?" suddenly asked Miss de Beer, with blazing eyes.

"I said I would find him," replied Smedley, slowly; "and I will if he is alive."

"Alive!—of course he is alive. Who dares doubt it?" Her face was blanched, and her form trembled. Smedley looked at her questioningly. There could be no doubt her emotion was not assumed. "You see," she said, smoothing her features, "how well you have told your story—it has made me hysterical."

He still looked at her gravely. "Did I not hear you humming a refrain the other day, 'The Bells of Shandon'? Owen Elton, I was told, was continually repeating those lines."

She put her hands up to her eyes—"It was merely a coincidence," she murmured; "finish your story."

"There is nothing more"—then, after a long pause, "except to ask you not to give any further trouble to that suffering old man by unsettling Drury."

"Do you know, sir, that you are taking a great liberty in assuming that I am interested in Mr. Drury?—I do not know why I do not resent it; but, after all, you do not ask much from me."

She fanned herself gracefully, looking the while pensively at Smedley's dark face.

"Does it not occur to you that you are not paying a compliment to Miss Elton? I should say you were almost insulting her by pleading to me for her lover."

He flinched rather. "I did not see it in that light."

Of course not," she replied, scornfully, "there was no need for an appeal at all, and had you not been in love yourself with Miss Elton, you would not have undertaken the task of bearding me—though bearding is not the right term, as I have no beard—browbeating is better."

He winced again, and she sighed, the same wistful look stealing into her fine eyes, softening the hard look in them.

"I will oblige you, however," she continued, "by making an instantaneous cure of your friend, though, believe me, it is unnecessary. Here he comes, confident as a 'king over six,' as the Colonial boys call the golden finch with his six wives."

"You appear to be remarkably close friends; I expected to find you at daggers drawn," remarked Drury, with a slightly aggressive glance at his friend, as he approached from the companion-way.

"Yes," laughingly returned Miss de Beer, with her gayest manner, "you should be off with the old love before you are on with the new, and I have found Smedley a most interesting companion."

"Smedley without a handle," muttered Drury; "you are very friendly after an hour's acquaintance."

"An hour!—have we been an hour really?—why, it seems like a few minutes since Smed. came up."

"Smed., eh!—ah! pleasant name."

"I'll call him what I choose."

"Oh, certainly, call him pet names. Look at him," he continued, surveying his friend, who was tugging at his moustache, and trying to smile, "he is thoroughly happy."

"Say something nice," she whispered.

"We have had a most pleasant time, Dick."

"Im—mense."

"Indeed!—well, I suppose I am in the way?"

"Oh, no! Meddy and I have had our confidences."

"Meddy!—well, I'm"—and Drury finished the sentence under his breath as he strode away.

"Don't go; you promised to show me the line," she cried, with a little laugh that made him flush hot under the thought of ridicule.

"Well," said Smedley savagely, when he reached his cabin, "I deserve to be roasted over a slow fire, and riddled with small jokes, if ever I meddle again with matters that don't concern me."

"Holloa, old fellow!" drawled Drury presently, as he sauntered into the state room; "I've written in my diary for Olive, and told her what a lady-killer you are."

"What!"

"Don't shout so. I say I have told Olive how you carried on with that De Beer's girl."

"Don't be a fool, Dick! You do not suppose Miss Elton will care to read your exaggerated stories about me. Leave it out."

"Why, man, I never thought to see you blush. But leave it out!—no, sir. It is the only sparkling bit in the diary, my dear Meddy." A boot thrown viciously accelerated Drury's departure.

In another cabin Miss de Beer was dressing for dinner. She looked worn and harassed. "Oh, those bells," she murmured, "how they ring at my heart as though with a summons to make me speak! If I had but the courage—but I could not bear that man's scorn."

CHAPTER III.

FOSTER IS CURIOUS.

THE stewards, or waiters as people now call them, recognizing that a steamer is something of a floating hotel grafted on a warehouse, were making a great clatter with glasses and plates as they laid the rows of long tables in the glittering saloon for the event of the day—dinner.

The first bell had, by its peremptory call to dress, broken up several promising flirtations, and the *frou-frou* of the dresses, as the ladies swept along the narrow passages, was as a soft accompaniment to the rattle of plates. The men came down too, to get into more ceremonious garments than the loose flannels in which they had lounged through the day, and soon all were busily preparing themselves for the great business of board-ship life. It was for that daily event that the skipper reserved one fresh anecdote, fresh for that particular voyage, but to be repeated at the appointed time on the next trip. Even jokes obey the universal law and move in cycles, gaining a little at each recurring round, until they can scarce be identified at first glance with the original germ. Dinner, however, is a good friend to jokes of all degrees of humour and in all stages of evolution, and the feeblest flash of humour is caught up and reflected in a universal grin, just as from its very rareness the poor little jokes born in the grim solemnity of the law courts are hailed with wild laughter.

Among the others, Smedley sought his sultry cabin and opened the port-hole to let the fresh air in. The better

to escape the heavy, warm atmosphere laden with the smells of varnish and paint and dinner, he framed his face in the circular rim of iron just above the reach of the heaving sea. The waters flashed from myriad facets under the burning rays, which now spread out, fan-like, from the sun, half sunk behind the molten horizon, while other spear-like shafts of light flamed up into the serene sky, flooding it with gorgeous beauty.

As he looked upon this glory of the sea and sky he presently saw a dark object cutting the water with a swift and silent motion. It moved parallel with the steamer, and about a fathom's length distant. Nearer it drew, until, could he have leant out, he might have touched it as the green wave rose, and then he shifted his gaze a few feet ahead. For a moment he held his breath; for looking up at him were the yellowish-green eyes of a great shark, hideously cunning and of devilish ferocity. There was, too, something like intelligence in their glance as the brute leered up wickedly before he sheared off with a roll that showed the gleaming white of his belly.

He turned from the port-hole with an involuntary shudder, and when he had scrambled down on to the floor he found Foster looking in at his door.

"May I come in?"

"Certainly," said Smedley, with a swift look to where the roll of manuscript lay among a litter of guide-books.

"I was passing to my cabin when it occurred to me that I had not properly fixed the position of that romance I told you of." He entered and began leisurely examining the titles of the books.

"I have packed the map away, and am afraid there is no time now to unearth it."

Never mind, my dear fellow. I see you have Baines' work on the gold-fields, and I dare say his map will serve admirably." He took the map, which fitted into a pocket inside the cover, spread it out on the bunk, and searched it diligently, while Smedley went on with his dressing.

"I cannot hit the place somehow, but, if you will allow me, I will take the book into my cabin and study the map after dinner."

"As you like, but pray don't take any trouble on my account."

Foster carefully refolded the map, placed it in its pocket, and went out with the book.

Reflected in the glass before him, Smedley saw the retreating form of his visitor; then, with his brush in the air, turned his head to look at the litter of books on the bed.

"Humph! he got the manuscript after all. Must have folded it in the map, and is probably reading it over now. Just as well I tore off the last page—and without any directions he will be rather puzzled."

It was Smedley's nature to take things for granted up to a certain point, and up to that point he kept his feelings to himself. He had assumed that Foster was a sharper, and now that his assumption appeared a certainty, he felt no indignation which would prompt to exposure. He would have nothing further to do with the man—that was all.

This attitude of tolerance or contemptuous indifference to things evil, arising, perhaps, out of a sentiment that it

was no business of his to judge, still less to condemn, was in the end disastrous. You can only afford to be indifferent to a venomous serpent when you have drawn its fangs. Exposure would have deprived Foster of the power of further mischief, while indifference played his own game.

It was true Foster had secreted the manuscript, and as soon as he entered his cabin he eagerly read it through ; but he was evidently disappointed. He had, from artful questions to Drury, come to the conclusion that the manuscript contained explicit directions as to the whereabouts of a treasure, but while, indeed, there was something about a treasure, there were no directions. Whether he expected the story to fit in with any previous knowledge was best known to himself ; at any rate, he felt very much as another rascal would feel when discovering that the fine brilliant he had filched was nothing but paste.

"This is a demned shame!" he muttered, viciously. "The key to the whole thing is missing. Ah ! the last page has been torn away." He turned the last page over, and looked at it from every direction. Finally he produced a powerful magnifying-glass, and studied the back of the paper. This patient investigation had its reward ; for he made out the impression of three words, which had evidently been boldly traced—these were,

"Rock ———, Table Mountain."

He pondered over these words for some time, re-read the manuscript, folded it up, and then stood hesitatingly with the roll in his hand. Then, with a cunning smile, he went to Smedley's cabin.

"I beg your pardon," he said, with an air of frankness, "I inadvertently folded this into your map."

Smedley looked into the cloudy eyes of the man as he took the roll.

"Have you read it?"

"Eh! what!—demme, sir, do you think I would do a dirty trick like that?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then you're no gentleman," stuttered Foster, "or you'd understand that a real gentleman"——

Smedley twisted the man round and kicked him out, and stood twirling his moustache.

Foster stood a moment clutching at the opposite door to steady himself, but he did not speak. He looked over his shoulder at Smedley, and snarled like a vicious cur.

It would have been better for Smedley had the man shown fight, and worked off his rage instead of subduing it until it turned to hate.

Miss de Beer, passing on her way to the saloon, paused a moment at the top of the side passage, took in the scene at a glance, and went on with a white face.

CHAPTER IV.

AT CAPETOWN.

ON the brightest of days the steamer cut its way into the untroubled waters of Table Bay. A few fishing boats were making for the crescent shore, which fringed the white town—the oars flashing under the vigorous strokes of the Malay boatmen, for whom a crowd of their gaily-dressed

womankind were waiting on the shore. Flocks of divers disturbed by the boats made for the rocks off Sea Point, each one following its leader head to tail, the flocks stretching out in sinuous lines of black ; while round about hovered swarms of Cape pigeons.

In position, opposite the low grey walls of the fort with its small guns, was anchored a Russian warship. The Russians have settled among themselves how to take Capetown, among other outlying seaports of the British Empire, and have decided how the capture is to be made. They intend to take the town by night, and in order to show how easily that could be done, an officer, one midnight, turned the electric light full upon the piers and landings. The authorities warmly remonstrated with the Russians next day, but still they periodically put into Table Bay, having by this time acquired a prospective interest in the vineyards, and weighed the bank managers and the Mayor in the scales with a view to a correct estimate of the contribution to be levied.

As our steamer passed the bows of the warship, it was seen that a group of officers were closely inspecting through their glasses some point of interest in the direction of the docks, where a forest of rigging told of a wealth of shipping.

"The lubbers," growled the quartermaster, "they don't like the looks of them new earthworks they are throwing up beyond the shipping, and they'll like still less the play of the big guns that will be fixed there."

"They feel like the fox when he sees a bulldog on guard over the poultry. But, quartermaster, tell me how is it that cloud rests on the mountain, when there are no other clouds in the sky ?"

“Why, miss, they call that the table-cloth, not that it’s much like a cloth, but for its whiteness.”

The great mountain, with its detached mass of the Lion’s Head linked to it by a high ridge, dominated the town, lying low on the gentle slope between the towering mass and the level bay.

The eye, wandering over sea and shore and wide streets, ever turned to the grey walls rising sheer up into the cloud-hidden height, “for custom cannot state its infinite variety.”

The waves have sapped at its foundations, the earthquake has rent its giant front, the lightnings have struck huge fragments from its walls, the air and the winds and the rains have eaten and worn innumerable cracks and fissures, and, last of all, man himself has made a track like a mere thread up its height ; but the waves have withdrawn from the attack, the earthquakes no more vex it with vast tremblings, out of the thousands of those who wore the beaten track to the summit the majority have past away, ere the elements have struck a few fragments from the surface.

Every man in the long line of those who have toiled up felt himself, with his high spirits, courage, and strength, the most important piece of God’s handiwork. Yet, every one of them, should he have read these lines upon the old rock, would have been humbled at the thought :—

“When you and I beyond the veil are passed,
Oh, what a long, long time the world shall last ;
Which of our coming and departure heeds,
As the seven seas heed a pebble cast.”

Upon the broad and solid piers were assembled a crowd

of people, the curious, the interested, and the merely idle. The well-dressed Englishmen, except for more leisurely movements and looser clothing, were not different from those who had gathered in the Albert Docks in London to say good-bye; and this very sameness helped much to lessen the sense of strangeness to those who had left England for a new home in the Colony. Emigrants to a new land are often filled with a sense of their own daring in leaving home, country, and civilization, and magnify the terrors of the distant shores, so that when they reach their destination they expect strange things to happen. But in the place of the foreigner the first spectacle that greets them is the self-possessed Englishman, and instead of uncouth sounds, they hear familiar accents of their native tongue. They realize then that they are not strangers in a strange place, and they step ashore with more confidence.

The big steamer creeps in the narrow entrance, and is brought tenderly and with infinite care alongside the quay to the sound of many hoarse commands, given forth in seeming confusion. The skipper on the bridge relaxes the stern set of his face, and gives a joyous welcome to a friend who leaps aboard before the gangway has been slipped. For the time a great responsibility has been lifted from his shoulders, and he and his officers are free now of the strain which was with them over every fathom of the six thousand miles between the green bluffs of Mount Edgecumbe and the rugged height of Table Mountain. Their calling, with its responsibilities and its monotony, the solitariness of the watches in the night, the vastness of the out-look to the horizon, fashions them on a true scale, bravest in

the hour of danger, calmest in the height of the storm, tender to children, chivalrous to women.

No sooner was the gangway run out than the steamer was invaded by an army of hotel touts, coolies, and young men about town, down to sample the drinks. After them came the friends of passengers, then exodus began.

There was leave-taking with the officers, who had spent many hours off time in tender communings with fair passengers, who were now called upon to say farewell, with a lingering clasp of the hand that told of regret and longing. But they were used to it. They said farewell in this regretful way to some two or three new young ladies every month, and by dinner-time they would recover their appetites. Not so with the fair passengers themselves; to them the voyage was like an oasis of flirtation in a desert of mere ordinary attentions. They had been made much of from early morning until late at night, and now that was all to cease. They who had been queens for three weeks over a limited but devoted land, were now to be lost in a multitude, or doomed to obscurity on a lonely farm. No wonder they stepped regretfully on to the grimy quay, and looked back longingly on the home of their brief authority.

The white-hooded hansoms crowding the quay, and mixed up in dire confusion among boxes and ropes, quickly thinned out—their Malay drivers rolling gracefully to the jolting of the cabs as they rattled over junks of coal and lines of rail, and urging their wiry horses to more rapid gallop by smart flicks from long whips, length of lash being a weakness of the dark-skinned drivers.

Miss de Beer, closely veiled, made her way through the

crowd of mixed colours on the quay, and was quickly whirled away. The two friends followed shortly after; Drury, picking out a cab whose driver wore a tall straw hat with a wide brim, and a crown that ran up to a sharp point, but whose head was nevertheless further protected by a coloured kerchief tightly wound. The horse went off with a bound that scattered the noisy crowd, and Drury, in the exuberance of his spirits, kissed his hand to a Malay girl, who glanced up at him from under her kohl-blackened eyelashes.

After a long sea voyage there is nothing so enjoyable as to be on land again, and the two friends took the jolting of the cab in good part, laughing loudly as a sharp sweep round the corner threw them together.

A hoarse voice near at hand, in a passionate outburst, called their attention to something in which there was no humour.

“ Good God ! ” was the cry, “ how can men laugh ? ”

They looked and saw a gang of convicts at work, some of them wearing leg-irons. The men had ceased work for a time, glad for any excuse to rest and look on the free outside world, and so justifying the saying that it takes ten convicts to do the work of one free man.

There were brawny Kaffirs, lazy and utterly indifferent, who had been sent down for cattle-stealing; ill-looking Hottentots with yellow wrinkled faces; rascally white men of the loafing kind, and white men who had held positions of trust and had once cut a figure in society.

The man who had spoken belonged to the latter type, but after his momentary outburst he turned his back upon the cab, and wearily bent his shoulders to his work. Not

so another convict who stood next him, a man of powerful frame, and with a face strong and stormy. He stood shading his eyes, looking after the cab which carried Miss de Beer, and the set of his mouth and heaving of his chest showed he laboured under some powerful emotion.

Smedley bent forward to look into the man's face, and as he did the latter looked into the cab. His face was pale and drawn, the strong chin looking all the firmer for the hollow cheeks and prominent bones; the mouth was shut tight like a steel trap, but the dark eyes flashed. They expressed rage, despair, hate, but the look in them changed to one of pride as they met the glance of the two men in the cab.

"No. 46," cried the guard, sharply, "go on with your work."

A large boulder stood by the convict; he swung the heavy hammer and split the stone into fragments.

"What a giant fellow!" said Drury; "I wonder what could have brought him to this."

"Some act of violence, I should think; did you note his look, as though he had seen some deadly foe?"

"Ay, and he smashed his head with that terrible blow, poor fellow."

They had reached the dock gates, where was a crowd about a hansom.

"What is it?" asked Smedley.

A little coloured boy, glad of the opportunity to tell the news, got up on the cab step.

"Please, gentlemen—lady fented—frighted by prisoner."

"Is there a doctor here?"

"Yes, sir—boy gone for ship's doctor."

They waited until the doctor arrived, received his report that the lady was Miss de Beer, and that although she had received a violent shock she was now better, and drove on after the briefest inspection of their luggage by the customs' official.

They drove along the bay, near where the fishing boats were being run up on the pebbly beach amid a crowd of picturesque Malay women and children. Long lines of snoek, suspended from lines, were drying in the sun, and the air was overladen with an ancient and fish-like smell that pursued them up the broad and handsome Adderley Street. Capetown is not well drained, and if it were not for the wind and the sea, the one—gratefully known as the Doctor—blowing away bad odours, and the other carrying away the drainage, the place would be unbearable.

Away up in the wooded slopes on the spur of the mountain the two friends found shelter in the spacious room of a white-walled, flat-roofed old house, with shady verandah and stoep.

CHAPTER V.

“ *PLATTE KLIP.* ”

THERE was a pleasant company at the hotel, and after “ tiffen ” they all sat out on cane chairs on the stoep and ate grapes, while they looked out over the white town to the brilliant blue waters of the bay.

There were three members of Parliament, farmers down to their legislative duties from the frontier, where in

border wars they had won names for themselves as trusted leaders. They were keen-eyed, resolute-looking men, sinewy and bony, with decided opinions on things they knew, and with nothing to say whatever about things they were ignorant of—a good feature, but one which does not conduce to sustained conversation.

One of them talked to Drury about the “Scab Act” and the idleness of the natives, until that young gentleman, seeing one of the party stroll off into the shaded walks of the garden, made an excuse to get away and study a bread-fruit palm. The member of the party who had drawn off Mr. Drury was a young Dutch lady—Miss Sannie Beyers, a charming girl, with black hair, round rosy cheeks, shy pretty eyes, and a gentle manner. In her white dress, as she stood in the shade, answering the gallant young Englishman in tones so low he had to bend his head almost to the level of her pink ears, she was a refreshing picture.

Smedley followed her slow movements, while he gave an inattentive ear to a black-bearded ostrich farmer, a Scotchman, who expressed his views on the members of the Government in terms clear, forcible, and uncomplimentary.

“Every man of them, sir, is paying suit to the Dutch party, and the Prime Minister takes his cue from Hoffmeyer.”

“But I had an idea that the Dutch colonists were totally indifferent to politics?”

“So they were, until they were taken in hand like a drove of sheep by the Africander Bond, and now they all follow their leader.”

“The Bond is an organized society, then, of great power?”

"You may well say so. It is the most perfect political organization there is anywhere. The whole colony is divided into divisions, these into sub-sections, and each section has its President and Secretary, who are responsible to a central committee, which again looks to the head centre. They have shown a wonderful capacity for organization."

"Why don't the English people combine for their own purposes then, if they dislike the Bond?"

"Combine!—they can't do it, sir. Englishmen, and Scotchmen too, for that matter, are too damned independent! Each man wants to be President, and if he does not get office of some sort he kicks. Obedience, strict and unswerving, is the secret of successful organization, and Englishmen will only obey the constable."

"In that case they cannot well object to the Bond; but I presume there is no race difference?"

"Well, racial differences exist, but they do not show, and a few years of uneventful government will bring about their removal, no doubt. See there now—your friend is already a victim to the Dutch Bond." He pointed to where Drury and Miss Beyers were sitting amiably together under a spreading acacia.

She was swinging her large straw hat, and looking down; while he, with his face towards her, was gaily chatting.

"He is incorrigible," muttered Smedley.

"Well, yes, new-comers generally are," said the Scotchman, stroking his coal-black beard. "There is something about our Colonial girls which is fatal to bachelors. Ah! Miss de Beer—I'm pleased to see you."

Smedley rose up to make way for her to pass, but she

dropped into his chair instead, and laughingly waved him to a seat on the upper step.

"Surely it could not have been this morning that I saw you last, Mr. Smedley—it seems days ago? One is so much engaged ashore, and I have done so much this morning, that the hours have stretched into days."

"It is otherwise when you are near," said the member, gallantly, "for then the hours are as minutes."

Miss de Beer bowed, and chatted with him gaily at first, and then with more seriousness as he touched on the diamond market, about which she appeared signally familiar.

"Ah, well!" she said at last, with a sigh, "I am tired of business. I long for quiet. Mr. Smedley, will you think it tiresome of me if I ask you to walk with me to the Platte Klip, the great flat rock above the town, where one can sit and talk or dream in absolute retirement?"

"I will go with pleasure," said the black-bearded man, with alacrity.

"Oh no, you talk too much! I want to listen to my own voice."

"I appreciate the compliment," said Smedley, with a smile. "I shall be charmed to keep silence."

The Platte Klip is a famous place for picnic-parties; and all people who have not the energy to climb the mountain, go to the flat rock instead, and there, reclining under the shadow of the pines, enjoy the pleasures of laziness well fulfilled. Lord Randolph Churchill has said that Capetown is a place of considerable repose, and that the people there "have inherited a pleasant conservatism of thought and of habitude."

Certainly the majority prefer to rest on the flat rock of uneventful ease, and watch others toil up the precipitous rock to the altitude of fame, where, though they have the world at their feet, they look ridiculously small to the watchers below.

Smedley looked up at the frowning walls, and the desire was in him to climb. It is the same emotion which impels men born in obscurity to struggle on and on until they reach the serene atmosphere far above the heads of their fellows. They often suffer much, fall and are bruised; but they climb on with set teeth to the wonder and ofttimes pity of the solid people, who find sufficient pleasure in the beaten paths. The most unexpected people are spurred on to ambitious efforts. I once encountered a slug near the summit of Table Mountain: he was the descendant many times removed of a slug of ambitious tendency, and he inherited the ancestral spirit.

Smedley noted how the white billowy cloud on the level top, though it seemed stationary when viewed from afar, was ceaselessly moving, yet never advancing beyond the brim. It crept in long wraiths half-way down the rugged sides, coiled back upon itself, and rolled along the summit in rounded masses, seemed to pause a moment on the brink, then melted away into invisible moisture, and even as it disappeared into space on the one side it renewed itself on the other, so that the grim rock was always covered with the soft mantle, giving beauty to its crown, nourishment to the grasses and bright flowers, and strength to the springs.

"It seems to me," mused Smedley, as if to himself,

“like a true woman—gentle, constant, tender, and beautiful.”

Miss de Beer glanced at the mountain, then let her gaze linger on his grave, melancholy face. There was a tender look in her eyes; but this changed very soon, for no beautiful woman cares to be neglected, especially for a thing so evanescent as a cloud; moreover, she had not brought him there to discuss that over-mastering pile of rock.

“Mr. Smedley,” she said, opening a large ostrich-feather fan, “you have not asked me why I brought you up to this lonely place.”

“No,” said he, returning his gaze reluctantly to her face; “I had ventured to think it was in kindness to a stranger.”

“A stranger!” she said, and looked at him over the waving tips of the plumes, with a challenge in her fine eyes.

“A stranger to the place,” he added, with a smile; “not, I hope, to you.” He spoke courteously, but without the slightest indication of sentiment, and she bit her full red lips and sighed. Then she cast about in her mind for a way to broach the subject on her mind, and presently, in a soft voice, very sweet and low, she sang these words—

“Oh, those bells of Shandon,
They sound so grand on
The pleasant waters of the River Lee.”

He started as though he had been suddenly awakened out of a dream and recalled to a duty he had forgotten. His mind rapidly recurred to the last conversation he had had with Miss de Beer, and her fainting at the dock gates.

"Have you something to tell me about Owen Elton?" he said, eagerly.

"Why, I declare you have a woman's intuition," she said, somewhat piqued at his eagerness. "Mr. Smedley, what would you say if I asked you to abandon your search for Mr. Elton?" She looked at him calmly, but her lips, hidden by the feathers, were open and dry.

He looked at her amazed, to see if she were joking, then convinced she was in earnest, he replied—

"I should ask your reason, my dear lady, for such an extraordinary request."

She moistened her lips, then carried away by some powerful emotion, she poured out a stream of words, her bosom heaving, her eyes flashing, and her voice coming in gasps.

"I do ask you, Frank Smedley—I do ask you, for the love you bear his sister—for the respect you have for his father—for his sake—I ask you to give up this search. It will do him no good if you find him. Oh, listen to me, and do as I ask, for the love of Heaven!" She caught him by the arm in her emotion, and there was in her eyes a look of appeal which told beyond all words of her earnestness.

"My dear Miss de Beer," said Smedley, utterly taken aback, "really, I don't understand."

"Oh," she muttered, tearing at her fan, "if I could only tell him all!"

"Miss de Beer," he said, speaking sternly, "if you know anything of Owen Elton tell it me, and do not vex yourself and me with impossible appeals. You told me on board that you knew nothing of him."

“Would that I didn’t!” she moaned.

He began to doubt now whether she knew anything, and grew suspicious of some design on her part.

“If you have anything to tell me, say it—else,” he continued, coldly, “we had better return.”

She glanced at him reproachfully, with a trembling about the lips that would have tempted many a man to comfort her with words of tenderness, but his face was hard.

Nothing could have more speedily subdued her passion, and she straightened up at once into an attitude not without dignity.

“Mr. Smedley, I urged you for his good. This very day I heard of Owen Elton ; and be sure of this, I would not humble myself to you had I not cause.”

“But how can you say this unless you have seen him?”

“I heard of him,” she said, with a shudder ; “and I ask you again, solemnly, and with a full sense of the meaning of my words and the consequences, do not search for him.”

“That,” he said, waving the request aside, “is impossible, unless you can give me reasons.”

“Reasons!” she cried, clasping her hands—“man, it is because of the reasons I ask this of you.”

“Then, Miss de Beer, I must decline to grant you your request.”

“I will speak to Mr. Drury then, and he, I am sure, will listen to me.”

“As you wish, but my friend is scarcely more likely to grant this extravagant petition than I am, and even if he should, I will still keep to my quest.”

She made a despairing gesture, and then recovered her composure so suddenly that he again thought suspiciously of her.

"I feared as much," she said, looking at him with evident admiration. "Well, continue your search, and if you succeed, as I pray you may not, remember then that I warned you in time—and try to forgive me."

"I fail to understand how you may need forgiveness, except on the supposition that if you really know something which may be of service in our search, you will need pardon for not telling me. Be frank with me, Miss de Beer, you have told me too much and too little."

"Yes, I have told you too much; but ah!—Heavens! if you had seen what I had to-day you would not blame me for saying as much and not telling more. No, it is no use, Mr. Smedley, I will say nothing further—let us return."

They walked back in silence until they were within sight of the hotel, when she spoke again.

"I am going away to-morrow," she murmured, "and I may never see you more."

He expressed no regret or interest. The very vagueness of her warning began to disturb his mind, and he was thinking hard to find some clue in the words she had dropped.

"I should like much to carry away with me the certainty of your friendship." She looked at him almost yearningly, but he had not heard her, and instead of any suitable reply, he said grimly—

"Did that convict this morning frighten you very much?"

She had been expecting something different, and did not at first comprehend the words; but when she did, she stepped back with a sort of moan as though she had been struck to the heart. She stood looking at him fearfully with dilating eyes for several seconds.

"What do you know of this?" she demanded, with an effort.

He told her what he had seen that morning, and gradually she recovered her colour.

"It is true," she said, "that man was the cause of my fainting. I recognized in him a friend I had known in better days; but the tale is too sad for me to recount, and it would have no interest to you."

"Pardon me," he said, "for recalling such a painful incident to your memory."

"You did not recall it," she said, with great sadness, "it is burnt into my memory, and will follow me beyond the grave, if there is consciousness beyond. I will say good-bye now. I would like a few moments by myself."

"Good-bye. Are you, then, leaving Capetown?"

"I said so a minute back, but you did not heed me," she said, reproachfully.

They clasped hands, and he felt her fingers tremble. It gave him a feeling of uncomfortableness, more so when he noticed unmistakable tears in her lovely eyes. He did not know what to do with her hand, but stood holding it, as though it had been an object he had no use for and could find no place to leave it.

At last she threw his hand away from her, and flushed and looked away, then glanced at him again with parted lips.

"Good-bye," she said again in a whisper, then turned away, but as quickly came back.

"I have forgotten the most important thing—but, like a woman's postscript, it comes better in at the last. Remember this and heed it well—do not trust that man Foster; he intends you some mischief."

He smiled, and almost involuntarily clenched his fist.

"Ah!" she said, eagerly, "I could have loved you for the way you treated him that evening on board. He is a mean creature, but nevertheless, dear friend, beware of him." She suddenly drew his head down and kissed him on the forehead, then turned and ran.

"Most extraordinary woman," said Smedley, twirling his moustache, while his bronzed cheeks took on a darker hue. "Never had such a thing happen to me before."

CHAPTER VI.

A FIGHT IN THE DARK.

On the verandah, eating grenadillas with a spoon in company with the young lady in white, was Mr. Richard Drury when Smedley returned, and she was introduced to him as Miss Sannie Beyers.

She gave her hand with a pretty gesture of friendliness, and, looking up with a mischievous smile about her rosy lips, greeted him in this wise—

"I have heard already much of you, Mr. Smedley. You made a rapid conquest on board, and then left her at the Customs House in a fainting condition without offering

assistance. Ship flirtations are fleeting, but you must confess your fickleness was too rapid."

He was rather taken aback, and looked wickedly at Drury.

"Don't appeal to me," replied the latter, waving his spoon; "you know how I abominate such levity."

"Yes," added Miss Beyers, turning to Drury, "of course you would never do such a thing."

She did not say this with sarcasm, but in pure innocence, and even Drury reddened with a twinge of shame.

"Is it possible," thought Smedley, "that he can already have been talking love to this girl, or"—a thought here crossed his mind that in some way she might be connected with Elton.

"Did you ever meet Mr. Elton?" he asked, and immediately blamed himself for jumping at conclusions, for the pretty eyes favoured him with a stare of decided amazement.

"I beg your pardon," he hastened to say; "we are making inquiries for a missing friend, and I had jumped to the conclusion that perhaps you knew him. Mr. Elton," he added, with a resolve to prevent any further mischief, "is a dear friend; in fact, he is the brother of the young lady to whom Mr. Drury is engaged."

"Thank you, I am much interested," she answered bravely, with heightened colour; "but if you will excuse me, I must go in and dress for dinner." She gave them each a warm grasp in the friendly Dutch fashion, and tripped in.

Drury threw an empty grenadilla shell at his friend's head. "Do you think there was any necessity for that gratuitous information about my engagement?"

"I hope there was not. Have you been with Miss Beyers all the afternoon?"

"My dear boy, you are really too much the duenna. No, I have not been in her company all the afternoon, though I should have liked it much, and while she was shopping down town, I dropped into a bar, where I saw the prettiest—ah! yes"——

"The prettiest—what?"

"Why, collection of—eh! bottles—coloured bottles, don't you know. I must take you down this evening and show 'em to you."

He turned aside to smile and wink, taking a bread-fruit tree into his confidence. "By the way," he said, suddenly, "what have you been doing all this afternoon? Did not I see you march off with Miss de Beer? Since you are so confoundedly particular about my movements, perhaps you will be good enough to give an account of your own doings?"

Smedley gave a judicial summary of Miss de Beer's extraordinary appeal.

"Very funny that she should show such warm interest in the matter. Do you think she was serious?"

"Certainly—although I was doubtful at times."

"Well, if she really was in earnest, my opinion is that we should look up convict No. 46."

"The same thought occurred to me."

"All right, and as you have had the honour of opening the inquiry, I suggest that you see the convict yourself. So much for business. I suppose you have no objection to my appearing at the dinner-table to-night. Miss Beyers will be there, and may be disposed to talk. May

I have your permission to respond in case she asks me to pass the pepper ? ”

Miss Beyers was at dinner, but she did not trouble Drury with any such requests. She studiously avoided catching his eye, and gave her attention to a gigantic but solemn young Dutchman.

In the evening Drury took his friend off to introduce him to the collection of bottles, but it was evident that the chief attraction in the respectable bar, the noonday haunt of legislators, was the young lady behind the bar, an Irish beauty, as unlike a typical barmaid as could well be imagined, whose modesty and charm of manner won her wide respect.

Smedley, who was not insensible to the attractions of a lovely face, for the first time thanked his incorrigible friend for his wonderful gift in discovering the possessor of such graces ; but he was not allowed to improve his opportunity, for they had not comfortably settled themselves when Foster entered, accompanied by the young Dutchman they had seen at the hotel.

Foster stood a moment looking at the two friends, half challenging the greeting which they would not give, then somewhat offensively broke in upon their chat with one or two loud remarks in coarse flattery of the young lady's looks.

She gave him an unencouraging response, and continued an animated talk with Smedley, whereat Foster drew the Dutchman into a corner and spoke in Dutch.

Smedley had made one rather good repartee, which drew a ripple of laughter and an arch look from beneath long glances. A heavy hand was laid on his shoulder, and a heavier voice said—

"Englisher, I want to speak with you."

Smedley shook off the grasp and turned to find the young Boer scowling down upon him. "Well, what is it?"

The other did not reply, but moved toward the door, and hitched his shoulder as an indication to the rest to follow.

Smedley was puzzled. "Is it a custom of the country?" he asked.

"Perhaps the gentleman resented you eating his share of strawberries at dinner," drawled Drury, fixing an eye-glass, and looking at the young farmer with an air of elaborate criticism peculiarly aggravating to the person under inspection.

"Come," growled the Boer.

"You will have the goodness to explain yourself, or wait, my friend," said Smedley.

"Rooinekkers jij es bang!"

There was no doubt about his being in a great rage about something.

"I beg your pardon," returned Drury, "will you kindly say it over—slowly?"

"He says," remarked Foster, with a sneer, "that you are afraid."

"Well, yes, he does look dangerous; hadn't you—eh—better take him home to bed?" said Drury, with a look of affected alarm, at which Smedley smiled.

This was too much for the young fellow; he laid his huge hand on a wineglass and dashed the contents in Smedley's face, then stood back on the defensive with a flush on his heavy face.

Smedley wiped the wine from his face, apologized to the frightened young lady that such a scene should have happened, then walked out without taking any notice of his assailant. Drury beckoned to the Dutchman to follow, and the four men gathered in the quiet street.

"It is rather dark here," said Smedley, quietly; "and is, moreover, too public."

"What!" said the Boer, "will the Englisher fight, or does he mean only to talk like a woman?"

"I know the place," said Foster, and hurriedly led the way through an avenue of oaks to the Town Gardens. The gates were locked; but they scaled the barrier, and soon were on a level sward in the midst of heavily scented flowers and tall trees. There was barely light enough from the brilliant stars for each to distinguish the other's movements.

"Now," said Smedley, speaking sternly, "will you explain?"

"No," said the young Boer, fiercely; "you will have to fight or take a whipping like a dog."

Smedley divested himself of coat and waistcoat without further words, but with a calmness that was a great deal more threatening than bluster.

The Dutchman scoffed at this proceeding as being useless waste of time, and boastfully remarked to Foster that one blow would be enough for that *rooinckker*.

"He had better take off his coat," suggested Drury.

"Hold your mouth," was the brutal reply, "or I will stop it for you!"

Drury shrugged his shoulders and walked away a few steps.

"I am ready," said Smedley, throwing his weight on his toes, and moving with a light, springy step, while the Dutchman, towering a head taller, stood with his legs together and his huge arms hanging loosely.

"I have held a wild ox by the horns," he said, "and you—phoooh!" he aimed a blow, which met with no resistance, and ere he could recover he received a stinging smack in the face.

With a roar, he rushed at Smedley to crush him, but his opponent sprang to one side.

"Hold still!—stand there, Englisher!" he cried, as he again struck the air.

"He is afraid of you," said Foster, with an oath.

"Truly he is," replied the Boer, passionately, "and I'll not chase him another step. Let him stand up like a man."

"Pay no attention, Frank," said Drury, earnestly; but Smedley walked up to the young giant with a fierce look on his face, at last thoroughly roused.

The Dutchman launched a savage blow with all his strength. It was turned off, and then Smedley sent his opponent reeling like a drunken man. The Boer stood with one hand to his face, and his body swaying.

"Now, you will apologize!"

"Verdom!—no," shouted the other, and again he rushed on, swinging his arms. But it was in vain. The left arm, straight from the shoulder, steadied him, and a second after a crashing blow from the right stretched him senseless on the grass.

For a minute he lay like a log; then, with a moan of pain, he sat up with his hands to his head.

"Mein Gott!" he said, presently, "it was a mule that kicked me!"

Smedley laughed, and took the other by the hand to pull him up.

"Karel," said the Boer, as he felt the muscles on the arm that had struck him, "my! you hit hard."

He seemed easier sitting on the grass, and Smedley withdrew his hand. "Have you any objection now to tell the cause of your conduct?"

"I will, and I must yet beat you for it. Mynheer Foster told me you had been impertinent to Miss Beyers."

"Mynheer Foster is a scoundrel, and he has lied to you. Where is he?"

"Oh," said Drury, who had just succeeded in lighting a cigar, after having made a dozen fruitless attempts during the battle, "he is climbing over the gate."

"He is a scoundrel, truly," said the Dutchman, "to leave his friend—though friend of his I'm not, for I only met him this day. My name is Beyers. Come to the hotel with me, and we will have a night. But, Karel, you hit hard. Look here—one eye is shut, and there is an ostrich egg on my forehead. Well, I'm glad that I shall not have to whip you."

"You're a brick, Beyers!" said Drury, helping up the giant. "So she's your sister?"

"Yah, she is, and I am here to look to her. She has been to college, and I am down from the Transvaal to take her home."

They did not have a night of it, but got the young Boer to bed, and then Drury put a wet bandage round Smedley's

arm. It was discoloured from wrist to elbow from the effect of the blow which he had parried. "Well, Dick," he said, "you see Miss de Beer was right. Foster has commenced his campaign, but in a manner so clumsy that it proves him more fool than knave."

CHAPTER VII.

"No. 46."

NEXT morning, while Drury fraternized with Stoffel Beyers, Smedley, furnished with a passport, went down to see convict No. 46.

When, after some delay, he was face to face with the man, he discovered that he had undertaken an awkward business, and instead of being at his ease, he was thoroughly uncomfortable.

The convict looked like a man who would resent any idle curiosity, and stood with folded arms and a forbidding scowl, as though he already expected that he was to be subjected to impertinent inquiries. His brown eyes, gloomy, with a smouldering fire in them, were fixed steadily on his visitor, and his square, long chin was thrust forward, imparting an attitude of defiance to his head.

"What is it you want?" he demanded, in a voice strangely authoritative, considering his position.

"I have just arrived from England," said Smedley, casting about in his mind for some form of address, and deciding upon a plain statement, "in search of a friend who disappeared about four years ago."

The convict nodded his head coldly; but Smedley,

watching him closely, saw the muscles of his cheek suddenly harden, as though he had tightened the grip of his jaws.

"He must be found within a certain time, for his father's life depends upon his reappearance in England within twelve months."

"Well," said the convict, as Smedley paused.

"I thought—I had a hope, that you, perhaps, could give me some information."

"Why?"

"Well," continued Smedley, desperately, "you must meet a great many people." He stopped, for the convict's face grew pale, then flushed.

"Yes," he said, with intense scorn; "I meet a lot of people—respectable people, murderers, forgers, thieves—would one of them be your friend? If so, I think you had better return."

"I beg your pardon," said Smedley, shocked at the passionate outburst, and not knowing how to get on with his mission. "Then you can't help me?"

"You have not told me the name of this friend," said the other, "or," he added, as a thought struck him, "you have just come in out of curiosity to see a convict. If so"—he took a step forward with a threatening gesture.

"Elton was his name, Owen Elton," said Smedley, calmly.

The convict staggered as though he had been struck. "I knew him," he replied, hoarsely, while the colour died out of his cheeks.

"You knew him!—can you tell me where he is?"

"Yes." He turned round and paced the narrow cell

with quick steps, then faced Smedley, with a singularly strained look in his face.

"Where is he?" asked Smedley, breathlessly.

"Dead!"

"Dead!—good Heavens! man, it cannot be!"

"Owen Elton died at Kimberley four years ago."

Smedley stood staring at the speaker, not knowing what to think or say.

"Is there anything more you wish to know, if so be quick. These memories are not to my liking," said the convict, gloomily.

"How was it his friends never heard of his death?"

"He had no friends, poor devil!—he was abandoned, betrayed." He ground his teeth, and glared at the wall as he had glared at Miss de Beer. "I would to God that I had died also!"

Smedley groaned. "I can at least find his grave."

"It is one among a thousand nameless mounds. That consolation will not be yours," he added, with a bitter smile.

"You have not much feeling, my man."

"Not much feeling! Good God!—get out of this cell! Feeling! Four years—and every hour through every day my heart is on fire with shame, regret, hate, remorse, and longing. Feeling! Oh that I did not feel—that I were a dull animal with no past to haunt me, and no future to terrify!" He paced the cell in a fury of passion, the fire in his eyes giving a look of madness to his face.

"I am sorry," began Smedley.

"Damn your sorrow!—keep that for the dead man's friends, they may want it."

Smedley thought of the old man in Devonshire, and the brave-hearted girl, and he sighed.

"I suppose they have suffered too—his friends?" said the convict, roughly, though all the fierceness had gone out of his face, and the deep-set eyes were now wistful.

"His father is dying," said Smedley, sadly.

The convict moved his lips, but his voice stuck in his throat. "I had a father too," he muttered. "A sister too, I think you said—and does she miss him?"

"He is seldom out of her mind, and this news will be her death," said Smedley, speaking to himself.

"Better dead than shamed," muttered the convict, hoarsely, clutching at his throat as though he were choking. "Better an early death sanctified by sorrow, than a long life made hideous with shame. Better dead," he muttered, while his eyes again took on that feverish look. "There is nothing more to say. Why do you remain to torment me?—I told you Owen Elton is dead."

"Just a word—did he ever say anything to you about a fortune, or treasure?"

"He did," said the convict, growing calm again; "I distinctly remember his showing me a statement about some hidden treasure in Mashonaland."

"I have seen it; his sister received it, and she has entrusted it to my care. The paper, however, contained no definite instructions, without which a hunt for treasure in a wild land would be a wild-goose chase. It refers, however, to a key to be found on Table Mountain."

"Yes, I remember."

"Can you assist me?"

"I believe I can, but before I do so, place your hand in

mine, and swear that if you are successful, the treasure will be divided exactly as is stipulated by Owen Elton in the paper which you refer to."

Smedley did so, grasping the convict's hand firmly, and repeating the solemn words the latter used.

"Elton posted the statement to his sister shortly before his death, but he retained another portion, which he entrusted to me for want of a better guardian. He did this because he was afraid the whole document would fall into the hands of another person, and he bound me, as I have bound you, by oath, to place the second portion on Table Mountain, or deliver it into his sister's hands. He had thought that I would find the treasure, for he had confidence in me. I need not tell you the reasons why I have not fulfilled one part of his mission. In order to fulfil the second part I escaped from prison and placed the scroll in the southern face of a large rock, fifty paces from the mouth of the gorge leading to the summit, and in a narrow crack exactly seven feet from the surface. It is secured in a wild-goose quill."

"Why did you select Table Mountain?" asked Smedley, who was intensely interested.

"Heaven knows!—it was a fancy of poor Owen's; but it cost me another year's imprisonment, the penalty for escaping. If it were not for that I would not have told you so much, but you look honest."

Smedley did not smile at this commendation from a convict.

"You may be sure," he said, earnestly, "I will do my utmost. Now tell me, is there anything I can do for you?"

The convict bent his head a moment, and a spasm shook his powerful frame.

"There is," he said, "in that document on the mountain a reference to the Fossicker. You will have to find him, and work with him, and share with him. He is a miner who fossicks for gold in the alluvial diggings. He has a daughter. If you hear anything of her, you may, if you think of me on your return to Capetown, let me know. Say nothing to her of me. It is not fit that such as I should dim her life with the shadow of the prison."

"Be sure I will," said Smedley, heartily, "and perhaps when I return you will have more messages for me, which I will gladly carry out. Man, I have nothing else to do, and I am sure it will do you good to send me on missions."

The convict turned away with a hopeless look. "There is nothing left for me," he said—"nothing but oblivion."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DUTCH MAID OF ATHENS.

IN the evening they made a party to Wynberg, driving out along the finest avenues of pine to be found anywhere, Drury having, with the assistance of young Stoffel, persuaded Miss Beyers to accompany them. There was no time for serious talk between the friends, but in the quiet of the night later on they sat out on the stoep, and there they pondered on the fate of Owen Elton.

"Well," said Drury, after a long silence, "it would

seem that our mission has ended before it has begun. It would be loss of time to make any further search."

"I suppose so," said Smedley, sadly.

"What will you do now?"

"I will go to Kimberley first, to verify the convict's story, and if it is true I will make for Mashonaland."

"In search of that treasure? Nonsense! It would be sheer waste of time. If there had been any likelihood in the story, you may be sure that Owen Elton—poor fellow—or some one else, would have secured the wealth."

"Then I understand, Dick, that you will not go?"

"Don't put it in that brutal way; say you understand that I am so convinced of the foolishness of the story that I would not be justified in setting out on a fruitless expedition."

"It is just as well, Dick, though I don't know how I will get on without you, and it will enable you to return to England, and at once break the news."

"What! return to England! No—decidedly not. The idea is absurd—just when I have made a few pleasant friends."

"I should have thought that Miss Elton was of more value than a few chance acquaintances."

"Of course, quite so, my dear fellow; but you know it would be scarcely the thing for me to fly back on the strength of the first rumour we hear about Owen. Moreover, Frank, I am not certain that I will not, after all, go with you to Mashonaland. You pass through the Transvaal, I suppose? Besides, Frank," continued Drury, growing more in earnest in his dislike of a return as he thought of Miss Beyers, or perhaps dwelt upon the

terrible news he would have to bear, "if I were to return now with the news that Owen was dead, it would kill Mr. Elton."

"True," said Smedley. "I mean to climb the mountain to-morrow morning."

"What an impetuous fellow you are! Why not take matters with more deliberation, like our friend Stoffel, for instance, who says you will get there all the same if you walk instead of run?"

"Well, I start to-morrow morning."

"Oh, all right," grumbled Drury; "call me if you like; but don't you see now how ridiculous the whole thing is? The man who would hide a secret on the top of a mountain must have been a crank. Poor Owen! I wonder if Miss Beyers would care to go up? What do you think?"

"I think, Dick, you had better go to bed."

The next morning found the two friends on their way to the top of the mountain. Passing plantations of sombre pines, they entered a path which shaped itself to the windings of a narrow stream, haunted by yellow-skinned nymphs. The fact being that the practical eye of a washerwoman had marked the foaming torrent and converted it to cleansing purposes. The women stood knee-deep in little boiling pools, their cotton skirts gathered in between their knees, and their ready tongues keeping time to the swift movements of their brown hands, as they rubbed the linen on rounded stones. Owing to the narrowness of the stream, they had to stand in a line, and it appeared as though the line were a mile long. At the tail-end, the water, charged with soapsuds,

was discoloured and foul, but that made no difference to the dusky workers. Girls with bare feet, and not unattractive looks, stretched the linen over scrub bush and banks adjoining, and one of these, after a whispered conversation with a companion, stepped up to Drury and presented him with a card.

Drury fixed his glass and read out this invitation: "Malea Abdul Hadje requests the pleasure of your company at a friendly ball, Kerom Street, on Saturday evening."

"Thanks, Malea. Does this invitation extend to my friend?"

"Oh, yes," replied Malea, with a soft look out of her black eyes, and a smile which showed a row of even teeth blackened with betel.

"What is a friendly ball, Malea?"

"Why, sir, we have dances among our people, and sometimes gentlemen, like you—strangers—wish to join."

"How did you know we were strangers?" asked Smedley, rather sharply.

"I could surely see; besides, sir"—the girl paused, and looked down at her toes, while in some confusion she traced a pattern in the sand.

"Besides what?" demanded Smedley, with increased sharpness.

Malea did not reply, and Drury, with a look at his friend of profound scorn at his brusque way of cross-examining, interposed. "Now, Malea, let me see the light of your eyes again. I could not tell whether they were brighter than that pretty girl's below there."

"What, that girl Fatma? She is always trying to make sweethearts. Phoooh!" Malea bridled up, shot a defiant look in the direction of the unconscious and much-injured Fatma, who was apparently struggling with a sheet, and then turned her large eyes upon Drury.

"Ah!" said the latter, with diplomatic cunning, "poor Fatma—I feel sorry for her."

Malea plumed herself at this insidious compliment. "You will come, then, to the ball?"

"Of course, my dear, when you will be there. But tell me as a favour who it was told you to ask us?" said Drury, venturing a random shot.

"You know, then, we were told to ask you. I suppose I may tell?"

"Of course, my good girl. You will tell me as a friend, or I shall ask Fatma."

"No, not that girl. I will tell you—it was Mr. Foster."

"The devil!"

"Yes," she laughed, "that one. But," she added, in a tone of alarm, "you must not tell—he has the evil eye. If he is angry with you, he just looks, and you will die, surely." At the bare thought of that baneful glance, Malea turned and fled to the line of workers.

"I say," observed Drury, as they continued their climb, "that fellow seems to take a deep interest in our movements. Will you go to the friendly hop?"

"I think so—decidedly."

"Umph!" grunted Drury, noting his friend's abstracted look, "there's no making you out. In London you would never go out, while here you accept with shameful

eagerness a dubious invitation of this sort. You will have to go alone, if you go at all."

"And this from you--well, that is good!" laughed Smedley. "And you showed quite a lively interest in Malea's eyes."

"Bah! her lashes were kohl-blackened. Give me liquid brown eyes."

"Bosh! grey, you mean. I swear Miss Elton's eyes are grey--rarest and loveliest."

"Glad you think so," said the other, with a gesture of impatience. "I was thinking at the moment of Miss Beyers. Now, for Heaven's sake, Frank, don't preach! You appear to think that when a man's engaged he can have no eyes for the charms of other women. One particular woman may be the particular object of one man's affections, but the loveliness of woman is a gift to all men."

They strode on in silence over Platte Klip, then on out of the pines, among gigantic rocks torn from the frowning precipice, and finally into the mouth of the gorge, which ran at a steep incline, wedge-shaped to the very summit. The bare walls, with here and there a broad-leaved plant towering up, impressed them with a sense of littleness; and as they climbed on over loose stones in a path washed out by mountain torrents, the silence produced in them a feeling of awe. The displacement of a stone sent a hollow sound through the vast and roofless aisle, a solemn sound like the faint far-off whisper of a grander pæan in bygone days. When men worship now, they go down into crowded buildings; but of old, they set up their altars on high places, where the handiwork of the Creator was at its

grandest. Times have changed, and the people with them. No one now would climb a mountain to listen to a sermon ; and if a party were confronted on the summit by a gentleman clad in broadcloth and white collar, they would fling him over. The only sermon our friends heard was from a crow which winged its heavy way across the gorge, and croaked ill-luck and dire misfortune. Smedley walked on in silence, the gloom deepening on his expressive face. What is that mysterious depression that falls like a shadow on the spirit ? It comes sometimes as a presentiment of death ; but more often leaves nothing but a vague sense of impending trouble. Smedley was not a gloom-pampered man, and he tried to shake the fit off, and fix his mind on the task he had set himself of finding Elton, for he somewhat doubted the convict's story. Elton had gone—utterly, leaving no trace with any one, no sign, except an extremely unsatisfactory one, that he had left a key to the whereabouts of a treasure on the mountain. He looked up to where the gorge narrowed to a small rift above. There was no cloud now, and beyond the grey walls was the blue sky. The task seemed hopeless indeed, and if it proved so, what then ?

At once his thoughts went back to the lonely home on the moor. He saw again the white hair of the old man waving above the dim and weary eyes ; and he saw the brave, sweet face of the daughter, and heard again the tones of that voice, "Courage, father, courage." He thought, and he could see, as though the story were written out before him on the surface of the rocks, how the young life was fading away in the attempt to keep alive the glimmering spark of hope that yet burned in the father's

heart. He read the bitter story to the last, and saw that the light of her life would go out suddenly without a sign of warning.

"It cannot be," he said aloud—"it will not be." And a look of stubborn resolve settled on his face.

"I say," shouted Drury, who was labouring in the rear, "I'm not a confounded chamois! Don't rush ahead like that—there's no hurry; this mountain is not going to disappear after all these years."

Frank stopped. As he watched Drury leisurely picking his way, it came upon him that the reward would not be for him. He put the thought aside, but ever and again a wild yearning for the girl he could not win took hold of him, and Dick at those times never failed to increase the bitterness of his struggle. Drury did so now by showing how little he appreciated the prize he had won. He spread a handkerchief on a boulder and sat down, with the firm belief that the interposition of the thin linen fabric would soften the seat.

"I've been learning Dutch, old fellow. *Wacht-een-beetje*. That means 'wait a bit.' Just sit down and I will air my knowledge."

"What on earth induced you to such unusual mental exertion? Not the beauty of the language, I am sure."

"Quite right; it was the beauty of the teacher. You have heard of the 'Maid of Athens,' I suppose—passable verses by some obscure poet. Here is a much better version in the *taal*, or colloquial 'kitchen' Dutch—

"Sannie Beyers, ere onse skei,
Give, oh, give my heart naar mij.

"Excuse my putting in English words, but I have not

quite fixed upon convertible terms. The next line runs thus—

“Oh, those oogies himmel blaauw.

“‘oogies,’ you know, means ‘eyes.’”

“Very euphonious,” said Smedley, dryly; “and who is Sannie Beyers?”

“The Maid of Athens—the young lady at the hotel—sister to Stoffel. For a beginner, I think those lines are admirable.”

Now, Drury, in thus appropriating and spoiling a pretty poem by a Cape judge, was guilty of plagiarism in its worst form; but there was no reason why his friend should have taken them so ill. The words, however, jarred on Smedley’s mood, and he spoke with temper.

“Admirable nonsense! I would to Heaven, Dick, you would set about this task a little more seriously, and not allow yourself to be caught by every pretty face. I tell you it is not right to Miss Elton.”

“Look here,” returned Drury, with accustomed sternness, “if you don’t take care, you will cause me to detest the name of Elton.”

CHAPTER IX.

A FOUL BLOW.

WHEN they reached the top at last they lingered awhile to look on the far-stretching view, on the town, and pines, and vineyards, on distant mountains, and the silver sea, glittering and flashing in the brilliant light, and stretching into the haze of the horizon. They were well repaid for the climb. No one could look upon the glorious majesty

of nature and not feel imbued with the reverence which is not born of thought, but falls unbidden like the dew. What if the crust of the earth was formed on a cooling sphere of molten lava, there is a spirit in the brooding mountains, and in the vast seas, that is beyond the power of materialism to explain.

So long they stood there in silence, rapt in an ecstasy which must be akin to Nirvana, so that when they returned to consciousness the mist was all around, and they stood, to all seeming, on a pinnacle of rock up in the clouds, a dizzy height. The "table-cloth" was spread. The white cloud had wrapped them in its damp folds.

Drury shivered as he stepped back from the brink of the precipice and stumbled over a rock.

"Upon my word," he said, angrily, "this is a most ridiculous business! What is the use of breaking our necks up here?—let us get down again."

"Well, go along," replied Smedley, irritably; "you will doubtless find more congenial work flirting with Sannie Beyers."

"I confess it would be more pleasant than groping about in a fog after a goose-quill. Ha, ha, ha! it is very funny when you come to think of it."

"Funny!—yes, excessively so to the convict who came up here at his own risk out of some shadowy idea that he was bound in honour to fulfil a dear friend's request—very funny to that lonely old man on Dartmoor, who is waiting for some token of his missing son, and to his daughter whose heart is breaking."

"Hang it, Frank! what has come over you lately? You take offence at everything, but no one wants you to bother

yourself about this matter. If any one should feel concerned, I am that one, and"—

"And you are only concerned about getting back to your Africander Maid of Athens," continued Smedley, with a sneer that ill became him.

"Oh, go to the devil!" returned Drury, pettishly. "Good bye;" he turned to go, but Smedley restrained him.

"Don't let us quarrel, Dick, when we are on the threshold of our work."

"Your work!—who gave you any right to interest yourself in the matter?"

Smedley looked up in surprise. "Something has put you out, old fellow—my want of tact, I suppose. But if you really question my right, I may remind you that Miss Elton herself entrusted me with some share in this business."

"Oh! and did she ask you to spy upon me? If so, I wash my hands of the whole matter," shouted Drury, trying to lash himself into a rage, and glad of an opportunity for getting out of the fog.

"Do you mean that, Dick?" asked Smedley, quietly.

"Yes, I do; and since you are so confoundedly officious, you may tell Miss Elton so." He regretted these words as soon as they were spoken, and would have recalled them, had not Frank interposed.

"You are mad," he said, sternly; "I will give you till to-morrow to recover your senses. If then you dishonour yourself, you will no longer be a friend of mine."

Drury, betwixt shame and anger, lost his head, and struck Smedley in the mouth. "If that is madness," he cried, "you will find it repeated to-morrow."

Smedley shot one terrible look at the other, and took a step forward, but in between came the sad, sweet face of the girl he loved, and, without a word, he turned, and was lost in the mist.

Drury leant against a rock, flushed and still angry. "Damn his interference!" he muttered; "I don't need any guidance from him, and he has to blame himself for his own meddling." By and by, as his anger cooled, there was a revulsion of feeling, and he felt how like a brute he had behaved.

"Frank—Smedley!" he cried, "where are you? I did not mean it. Frank, old fellow, come back!"

Through the mist there came the sound of a jeering laugh, and Drury, hearing it, felt his anger return.

"Go your own way," he muttered, "and I will go mine." He groped his way to the mouth of the gorge, and went slowly down, pausing sometimes to listen and look up, and growing more depressed the farther down he went. "I hope he won't lose his way," he said to himself again and again.

In the meanwhile, Smedley had gone straight on into the fog, not caring where he went. He felt that the blow which cut his lips had been aimed at Miss Elton, and somehow he could not help feeling that he had been to blame. He turned about under this thought to find Drury and apologize, but he too heard that mocking laugh, and it steeled his heart again. He turned about again and blundered against a huge rock.

"By Jove!" he muttered, "I wonder if this is the rock." He felt round it, passing his hand above his head in search for a crack, but without any success. A

suspicion entered his mind that he had been the victim of a joke or a mad freak, as Drury had suggested; but while he was drawing his fingers lightly up and down over the smooth surface, he detected a sharp edge. Feeling carefully, he found that there was a crack, so covered with moss that at first he had missed it. In great excitement he passed his finger into the opening and drew it along to the very end. Twice he did this, and the second time he found the quill, which dropped to the ground.

Down on his hands and knees he went, feeling eagerly over every inch until at last he picked it up. "Ah!" he cried, triumphantly, "I have got it."

As he stood up he displaced a stone, which rolled a few feet, then stopped, as it appeared, for the clatter ceased, but a few seconds later the sound was repeated, muffled by distance. This arrested his attention. He searched for another stone, found it, and flung it a few yards. He counted fifteen before the sound of its falling reached him, then a series of reports came up in lessening volume, as if from below.

"Good Heavens!" he gasped, "I am on the brink!" and as he realized his terror, he crept round the rock, sliding his hands along its surface.

He had reached the turning, when he was felled to the ground. A dark figure groped over him, then deliberately rolled the unconscious man to the brink and pushed him over.

CHAPTER X.

THE FRIENDLY BALL.

MR. RICHARD DRURY was one of those careless beings who follow their inclinations wheresoever they might lead. He passed on from one passion to another, gathering sweetness from each, like the honey-moth which sips gaily of every flower until at last it is caught and held a prisoner till death by the innocent-looking blossom of the insect-catcher; or, like the hermit-crab, which goes about appropriating other creatures' shells, in the hope of finding a tenement that will fit its proportions. Drury had tried several shells in this way, finding one too small, another too large, but only hitting upon the exact one to fit in with all his likes just now at the most unfortunate time. He had after the first glow of the engagement felt that Miss Elton, with her fine nature and serious mind, was not intended for him. Certainly linked with her he would have felt like a very small crab hauling along a shell several times beyond its measure. Now, Sannie Beyers—ah, yes! Sannie with those *oogies himmel blaauw*, with laughter hovering about her ripe lips, and mischief lurking in her dimples—she was made for him.

There are many besides Dick who go through the world stealing happiness from others to brighten their own lives, taking a sweet memory there, a loving wish elsewhere, the very heart's blood of another, accepting all the homage they can win, and giving nothing in return but pleasant words which mean nothing. The world is sad with unrewarded love. Drury in his way meant no

hurt to Miss Elton. He easily convinced himself that the most honourable course would be to let her know that his affections had changed, and it never entered his mind that he would be guilty in so doing of heartless conduct. He had not the sympathetic instinct, and took his own feelings as a guide to action. So he reasoned that if it were good for him to sever his suddenly-formed engagement—and he remembered with satisfaction it was sudden—it would be equally good for her, and he at last arrived at the conclusion that he was obliging her. If every man could be a law unto himself the world would not be fit to live in.

All the same, though he could with ease free himself from the large shell he had met with in his aimless wanderings on life's shore, he could not wash his hands of the matter which Smedley had in hand. There was so much of honour in him to make him face death for an idea, and as the expedition into Mashonaland would undoubtedly be dangerous, that was reason enough why he should not retreat from it.

When he reached Platte Klip he sat down, and, with face turned up to the gorge, waited for Frank, for whom he had a sincere affection. All the morning he waited, shifting his position occasionally to keep in the shade of the pines, and dwelling on many an incident of the past when Smedley had stood by him in his troubles and shared in his pleasures. He went to lunch at noon, and in the afternoon strolled back with Stoffel and Miss Beyers.

They sat there chatting; Dick learning his Dutch from pretty lips, while Stoffel, stretched at full length,

smoked and smoked pipe after pipe of the rank-smelling but fine-flavoured Transvaal tobacco. His eyes were fixed on the gorge, and he heeded not the little manoeuvres of his sister to draw him into the conversation. At last, out of the smoke he came to some conclusion, and stood up lazily.

"I am going up there," he said, elevating his chin; "you can keep some strawberries for my dinner, Sannie—two basketsful—and some grapes also."

"Why, Stoffel, you surely are not going to climb up there!—you know you hate climbing, except it is into a saddle."

Stoffel was striding away.

"Wait," said Drury, "I will see Miss Beyers home, and will join you."

"That will be an hour lost, in the meantime Mynheer Smedley is without food, perhaps lying with broken bones." He strode on, leaving Drury in a fever, for he had not thought that Frank might be in danger.

"Do accidents ever happen on the mountain?" he asked.

Miss Beyers shuddered. "In the fog, many men have fallen over the cliff, but your friend was not careless, and surely he is safe."

"If anything happens to him, the blame will be mine," and in his misery at the thought of such a thing, he told her all that had occurred.

She paled, her lips trembled, and her eyes filled with tears. "Oh, Mr. Drury, you should not have told me that!"

She was so distressed, and looked so in need of sympathy, that he took her hand and caressed it.

“What have I done that you should have said bitter words, you who are such friends?”

“Done!—oh, Sannie, you have stolen my heart!” he cried passionately, and leaning over her, whispered, “will you not give me yours?”

She snatched her hand away, and walked on, a bright blush mantling her cheeks.

“You say such things to me, and we are in the shadow of the mountain!—it chills me. Perhaps even now he is crying for help, and you have made me the cause of his trouble.”

“Good Heavens! how you torture me, Sannie!”

“You may deserve it, but I do not mean to vex you. If he has lost his way, Stoffel will find him. He is slow when things go smoothly, and does not like moving, like you English, for the sake of doing nothing; but when there is need, there is no one so swift as my Stoffel. See where he is now.”

Dick looked up, and saw a tiny figure moving up the gorge with wonderful swiftness.

“It is a shame to let him go alone,” he said, somewhat piqued at her pride in her big brother; “I will follow now.”

“Ach, no!” she said, clasping his arm half unconsciously with a pretty gesture. “Besides, you know,” she continued, with some confusion, “you must take me back; I am afraid of those Malays below—though see I carry a piece of bacon to ward off the evil eye.” She drew out of her pocket a fragment of bacon-rind wrapped in paper.

“Drury smiled. “Take my arm, and put your trust in me. You will find me an excellent protection against the

evil eye—that is,” he added, artfully, “unless you think mine is evil.”

She looked up at him, but dropped her eyes under his ardent glance; and went on in silence to the hotel with a fluttering at her heart. There Drury left her, with an eloquent pressure of the hand, but without any of his usually gay, half-careless remarks, from which it was to be gathered that he at last was in danger of drinking deeply of love’s melancholy draught.

He went toiling up the mountain for the second time that day, and met Stoffel returning near the top. At his anxious inquiry Stoffel shook his head.

“I am afraid for the Englishman—there is no sign of him. We must get torches, and other men to help us, this night.”

“Do you think he is lost?”

“Yah; we must find him to-night or he will most likely die.”

“I will remain here,” said Drury, quietly, though his face was pale.

“That is good. You sit there and shout; maybe he has not fallen over yet, and may hear you.”

The big Dutchman strode down, and Drury made short excursions over the table top, calling on his friend, but getting no response.

It was dark before Stoffel came back, and with torches flaring, and all together, they went on cautiously, pausing many a time to shout and listen for an answering cry.

They slept under the lee of a large rock, and in the early morning began again, the young Dutchman, calm and watchful, taking the lead by common consent. He

parcelled out every section of the Klip, giving one section to two men, and bidding them all meet at the mouth of the gorge at noon.

There they gathered in time, worn and tired out. There was no need to ask if they had been successful, for their dispirited looks told of failure.

"He is either dead," said Stoffel, with his usual directness, "or he has climbed down the other path, and is safe."

With this little ray of hope they returned to the hotel, only to find it fade away.

Foster, who had been the most assiduous among the searchers, had by his sympathy and his hopefulness forced Drury to overcome his repugnance to the extent that he gave an ear to what the other had to say.

Even when the experienced guides declared that Smedley must have fallen over the brink, Foster was at great pains to point out that a man like Smedley, cool and experienced, would not have taken any rash steps. In this way he gradually won Drury's confidence, and learnt what had occurred on the mountain between the two friends. "Mark my words," said Foster, "your friend is safe."

"I wish I could think so," replied Drury, gloomily; "but if he were, he would certainly have returned."

"Ah! I would almost differ from you. My belief is that he discovered the key to the treasure, and has gone north.

"I shall be obliged to kick you, Mr. Foster," said Drury, in quiet tones, but with an ominous tightening of the lips.

"I dare say you do not like the suggestion," replied Foster, smoothly, "but you must admit that if I do take a worldly view of the matter, I have some grounds. Your friend studied the manuscript throughout the voyage, and after the provocation you admit you gave him, he felt himself at liberty probably to make use of the key when he found it."

Drury hated this man who, as it were, restored to him his friend only to destroy his confidence in him.

"Nonsense!" he said; "I don't believe a word of your theory."

"Quite right, sir; I admire you for it. But take a common-sense view of the thing. Put yourself in Mr. Smedley's place, and ask yourself if you would not do as I imagine he has. I am sure I would."

Drury smiled.

"You must not give up," pursued Foster, with oily persuasiveness; "you must follow him, you know. He will go first to Kimberley."

"And if I overtake him, what then?" answered Drury, speaking his thoughts aloud.

"You will brand him—a traitor!" said Foster, with a vicious look.

Drury looked into the dark face of his evil prompter with disgust. "If I have the good fortune to see him again, I will ask him to still honour me with his friendship."

"Humph!" said the other, shrugging his shoulders, "that is a fine sentiment, but it is not human nature. By the way, have you got that manuscript? I would be very much interested in looking at it again—of course you

know I could make no use of it without the key. I may be able to help you if I had the facts of the case."

"Thanks," replied Drury, curtly; "I prefer to manage the matter in my own way."

"Just as you like, my dear fellow. May I count on seeing you at Kimberley next week? I leave to-morrow."

Drury nodded his assent. He could not bring himself to be courteous.

"Look me up at the club," were Foster's parting words. "Young cub," he muttered, as he closed the door, "if he won't lend me the manuscript, I must take it from him. I am all right without it, but it is just as well to have everything clear. A good move to make him think that Smedley has gone on. So he has—gone on before, as the tombstones say." He looked up at the mountain. "Makes a colossal gravestone." And with an evil smile he went on into the town.

Drury sat a long time brooding over the suggestions made by Foster, and at last went into his friend's room. The sight of the luggage and clothing scattered about destroyed what probability there was in Foster's hypothesis.

"Frank would not have gone unprepared," he thought; "and he was of course totally unprovided for a day's journey, still less one of several months."

He sat down and stared at the luggage. Stoffel and Miss Beyers had gone that afternoon. The latter had left a flower for him, but nothing more, and he had not seen her. He felt depressed, and when he saw the ticket of admission to the "Friendly Ball," he was glad of the promise of diversion it held forth.

He lit a cigar, stood out on the lawn for some minutes, looking up at the grey mass of the mountain, and then with a shudder went down the dark lane to the town below.

He had scarcely entered Kerom Street, where the dance was to be given, when a Malay approached, and asked if he were going to the ball. Following his self-constituted guide, he soon found himself stepping from a low stoep into a dark stairway, which led up into a small room, badly lighted, and densely crowded with a singularly mixed assemblage of white servant girls, Malay women, a few young fellows out for a night, and a large proportion of coloured mashers, fashionably attired in smart patent leather shoes, wide trousers, gay waistcoats, and their heads covered with bright-coloured handkerchiefs. The servant girls were flushed and timid, half fearful of the dismal gaiety they were about to plunge into, and yet eager to begin. The Malay girls, in their huge gowns of brilliant colours, their glistening locks and flashing eyes, were already deep in desperate flirtations with the young white men, who showed a disposition at this stage to hang back, encouraged thereto possibly as much by the dark looks of the coloured swains as by their feeling of strangeness.

"Oh," thought Drury, "this is a friendly ball, is it? It seems to me as though there were all the elements for a pretty quarrel and life-long regrets."

He stood back against the wall watching the scene for some moments, and vainly trying to pick out Malea, the little washerwoman, from the dusky belles. A tall, sombre-visaged Malay came up and asked him what he would be pleased to drink, adding that it was customary for visitors to take something.

"Anything," said Drury, and the man went off downstairs. Opposite Drury sat a young Malay woman, a mantilla over her head, and a bright-blue gown swelling about her like an inverted balloon. She was a pretty girl, and Drury looked at her particularly, because she gazed so attentively at him. Presently she arose and came across the room to him.

"Will you dance with me, sir?" she asked; then in a low, quick tone, added, "Say no, please, and don't drink." She looked so scared after she fired those singular words off, that Drury paid more attention to her request than he might otherwise.

"Why, it's Malea!"

"Please, sir, say no, and don't drink."

"The wine has got into her head, poor little thing," he thought; but he was spared further reflection, for she stamped on his toes.

"Look out!" he ejaculated, as the pet corn shot a thrill through his system.

"That is right," she whispered, with a wicked twinkle in her eyes. "So you will not dance?" she repeated, in a louder voice. "I don't want you to—you don't look good for much," and, with these parting words, off she sailed to a dark-looking youth, who received her sulkily, and for whom her last words had been intended.

Drury was not slow to take a hint. When the tall Malay soon after returned with a glass of beer, he stole a glance at Malea, and saw her frown at him.

"It is too warm here," Drury observed; "can I not find a cooler room?"

"If the gentleman will come I can show him a good place." The Malay led the way on to a flat roof, where a couple of Madeira chairs and a table showed that it was used as a lounging place.

"Won't you drink?" asked Drury.

"If it pleases the gentleman."

Drury said it did please him, and the Malay taking a coin, presently returned with another glass.

"Before you drink my health, run down and get me a cigar."

The man obeyed, and Drury changed glasses. When the other came back Drury drained his glass at one draught; but if he hoped that his example would be followed, he was disappointed.

The Malay sipped a wineglassful, then held the glass and watched Drury, his glittering black eyes looking like points of fire in the darkness. This inspection went on for some moments, neither speaking, then Drury struck a light and lit a cigar.

The Malay sipped his beer again, and something in the taste aroused his suspicions. He put the glass to his nose, and then with a savage imprecation threw it at Drury's head, and sprang upon him with the fury of a panther. The glass went humming through the air and crashed against a lamp-post in the street, but no one heeded the noise in such a locality. On the flat roof there was a wild mingling of legs and arms, a quick breathing and fierce words.

A few minutes later, when the owner of the house went on to the roof, he stumbled over something soft, and, stooping down, found two forms closely locked.

“What! drunk so early? Verdom!—bluid!” He struck a light, and, after one glance, disappeared down a stairway, returning soon after with another man. Together they carried one of the inert forms down the stairway, locking the door leading on to the roof after them, and keeping on the darkest side of the street, left their burden on a stoep some distance off; then returned to the roof and revived the Malay, who was suffering more from the drugged beer than from the effects of the struggle. Spots of blood were washed from his clothing and hands, and he entered the ball-room, whose reputation for friendliness he had so well maintained, and where his presence would divert any suspicions that might hereafter arise

A policeman, chancing by the stoep, found Drury slowly bleeding to death from a deep wound in his thigh, and quite unconscious. Before this a dark form had stooped over the fallen man. “Dead,” he muttered, “or dying. I did not want that fool to use a knife—it makes a mess, and leads to awkward inquiries. Ah! here are his keys. Well, I must go—good-bye, and a pleasant trip, my boy!”

Without another look at the insensible form, Foster, for it was he, moved rapidly off.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CONEY HUNTER.

ON the morning that Smedley disappeared the sun rose in all its splendour, turning the sea into a silver shield, and tipping with red the mountain tops. On a rocky spur, at

the earliest hour of the dawn, stood a solitary figure. He was watching the mists melt away under the rosy light, and presently, when a sunbeam shot along the barrel of the gun he leant upon, he turned about to examine the crevices and pinnacles of the rocky mass.

He was a hunter of coneys, or dassies, the nimble-footed dwellers among the inhospitable rocks. It would have been difficult for any one to have said whether he was a very old man or one in the vigour of manhood. His yellow face, wrinkled and lined like a withered apple, betokened an ancient; but his small black eyes, keen and restless, and his active body, told of the vigour of youth. His equipment certainly gave testimony on the side of age.

His fowling-piece was old enough to have seen service in the era of flint-locks. The stock was bound around with raw hide to keep it from falling to pieces, and the barrel was dented in a dozen places. His felt hat was battered, his corduroy clothes worn smooth and patched in the most conspicuous places with fragments of different colours. It would have been hard to tell, indeed, which was the original pattern. His veldschoens were sound, though made in the roughest way out of untanned leather. There was a hungry look in his face as he swept his eyes over the highest points, on which the sun was just playing. "Dassies es skaars, und ek es honger," he muttered, as he failed to see the small dark form of a coney showing itself. "Yah, ek es honger—dere es nottings ter eat, nottings ter shoot, nottings ter smoke, nottings ter drink. Ole gun, you and me es good for notting."

After this frank admission of the emptiness of the world, he shouldered his gun and noiselessly passed round

the spur into a deep ravine, sprinkled along its narrow bottom with enormous rocks torn from the frowning walls which enclosed it. A mountain stream gurgled and foamed in and out among the rocks, but save this sound, there was absolute stillness in the confined and gloomy place. The hunter, accustomed to the silence of lonely places as he must have been, looked around into the dark shadows uneasily.

"Dere was few men come here," he muttered, "since dey foun' a dead un long time gone by. Honger es a strong man, else was I not come." He peered up at the rocks, then cautiously made his way up to the head of the ravine.

A shrill cry, something like a steam-whistle strangled at its birth, pierced the air, and went echoing down the gorge. The hunter's expression changed at once from something like fear to excitement, though the author of the cry was no bigger and no more terrible than a rabbit. He had the hunter's instinct, and would take the same pleasure in circumventing a coney as in stalking a buffalo. He took a small reed from his pocket and blew an answering call, shrill and defiant. The dassie on his perch far above heard and replied with enthusiasm. The hunter marked where the little creature sat basking in the sun, and began silently to climb the face of the precipice, moving from ledge to ledge with the ease of a chamois. At one point he had to draw himself up, and whether from carelessness or not, his gun slipped from his grasp and rattled down on to the rocks below. At the noise all the dassies in the place hurried out of the crevices to see what was up, and taking the key from the original

animal who had watched the whole proceeding, they yelled in unison, until the gorge was filled with the sound of wild laughter. So, at least, it appeared to the hunter, who climbed down in haste to recover his gun. Alas! the old fowling-piece was beyond recovery. The stock was completely smashed, the hammer snapped off, the trigger guard broken, and, what was worse than all, the barrel battered out of shape. The old man—he appeared old now—took up the ruined weapon and cried over it. He sat there long into the morning, feeling as if he had lost some of his life.

“Dere is no more use fer me,” he said, sadly, speaking to the old gun; “wife gone, chilluns gone, old frien’ gone—mus’ go too—yah, mus’ go too.”

He placed the remains of the gun on the ground, then shuffled slowly off, but paused presently, and went back with an idea working.

“Mus’ bury him, so’s no peoples take him away.” He cleared away a few stones, and placed the ruins in the trough so made, and began piling stones over it until he had built a small cairn. He stood back to watch the effect. “Jus’ one nice white stone put on top, then he all right.” In searching for this particular stone, which was to complete and give dignity to the tomb, he came upon a hat.

A strange thing in such a place, and he looked about in a startled way. Some seconds went before he could bring himself to pick it up. It was a new soft hat, such as a gentleman might wear, with nothing peculiar about it. He tried it on; it fitted comfortably.

“Ef dere was a coat and trousers mit him, it was better as good.” He glanced around, half expecting to find a

complete suit, but seeing none, turned to admiration of the hat again.

Holloa! what was that little hole on the front, and that spot of red? He touched it with the point of his finger. It was wet. With a shudder and a cry of alarm, he threw the hat away; then stood up shaking in every limb.

“Dere was a man dood, maybe, und a live man can’t stay where a dood un’s spook lives.”

He hastened away from the haunted spot, and the shrill scream of a dassie sounded to him like the cry of the dead man’s spirit. Ere yet he had got out of the gloom of the ravine, he turned to take one last fearful look at the precipice down which the dead man must have fallen. Even now, upon some ledge, with its white face turned up to the sky, the body might be lying. His keen eyes twice searched every inch of the grey precipice, then fixed themselves with wild dilating pupils upon a solitary bush, which clung high up to the grey wall. What was that hanging limp over the stem of the bush?—not a gnarled and twisted branch, but the limbs surely of the dead man. As he looked up, a leaf detached from the bush came fluttering down, glancing now right, now left, now swooping down, now poising gently, and at last, after a thousand twists and turns, settling at his feet.

“It is a sign from the dood,” said the hunter, in hoarse tones. A sign from the dead, loosened by some spirit and sent down to him with a purpose. He picked it up and read it. It was a broad leaf, with curved edges, hard on its back of shining green, and soft and white on its underside. He had used many such a leaf before as a drinking

cup, but never did he look upon one with such awed interest as now. The message was plain—written in a drop of red blood, still warm, and he read in it a sign that life was not utterly gone out of that body held between heaven and earth. The hunter read the message, and his fear went from him. He became a young man again, with an old man's coolness and resource. Uncovering his buried gun, he unwound the rheims from the shattered stock, and began the ascent. He went up from ledge to ledge, using toes and knees and hands, finding his way more difficult the higher he went, yet never pausing in his steady progress. He grew smaller and smaller, and the dassies in alarm screamed loudly : a slip, and he would lie beside his gun, battered beyond recognition. But he never thinks of the danger, and never looks down, not even when a large rock, already loosened by water, slips from under him, and hurtles through the air with a savage whirr. He steadies himself, but cannot help waiting for the crash. He closes his eyes, and a tremor passes through him, when, with a tremendous report, the fragment strikes a larger rock below and he knows it is shattered to dust. He feels weak too, from the want of food, and the exertion. If he were a younger man, he would make a desperate struggle and fall. But he keeps still. He grasps a point of rock between his teeth, and presses his body against the cliff, and to any one below would look like a brown spider spread out against the grey wall. Now he moves again, slowly edging up inch by inch. Now he misses a step, and swings out over the yawning abyss ; but he is not beaten yet, and holds on stubbornly. Now he reaches the bush at last, and falls

exhausted on the ledge, with his face to the cold rock, and his breath coming quick and loud. A magnificent effort for any man, and all the greater because there was no one to applaud and encourage. His clothes had gone into rags early in the climb, his veldschoens still held good, but the skin was off his knees, and his hands and arms were torn and bleeding. After a short breathing spell, he brushed the sweat out of his eyes and stole a glance, half fearful, at the strange burden borne by the tree. Almost concealed by the large leaves, with shoulders jammed between the thicker branches, and legs and arms hanging lifeless, was the body.

The old hunter parted the leaves, and looked down upon a pallid face. With a grunt of relief, he saw that the eyes were closed, and that a drop of blood from a small wound in the forehead was slowly trickling. The man still lived, though how he escaped was a marvel. To the brink above it must have been a hundred feet, and the fall from such a height meant certain death. A bush of the kind that now held the body, and which was also held among the branches, showed that the fall had been broken. Slowly, and with great care, for it was a difficult matter, the hunter drew the insensible form on to the ledge beside him. The left arm, he noticed, dragged in the sleeve—it was broken above the elbow.

Taking off his torn coat, the old man made a pillow of it, then taking a leaf, went off to where a tiny rill oozed out of the rock, and returned with a few drops of cool water, which he sprinkled on the pale face. Several times he made his tedious journey to and fro on a narrow ledge, then drank from the leaf himself, and sat down to watch

with his back against the rock. Utterly tired out, he fell into a sound sleep, from which he was awakened by a groan.

The little black eyes, opening out of that wisened walnut face, met a pair of brown eyes, contracted by pain, and fixed on him with a bewildered look, into which consciousness was just returning. The inspection went on for some time, the black eyes twinkling out of an unmoved mahogany mask, while the brown eyes slowly lost their puzzled expression, and the pale lips opened to speak one word.

“ Baboon ! ”

Then the wrinkles which circled all around and under the black eyes ran into one another, as a smile broadened about the old hunter’s mouth, before he broke into a loud laugh.

“ Baviaan ! he tink ole Gert es a baviaan ! Oh ! oh ! oh ! ”

“ Not a baboon—a man,” were the next low words, at which Gert laughed again, loud and long.

Then his face resumed its walnuttty expression, and he went on another journey for water, which Smedley, who of course it was, drank eagerly, then asked for something to eat.

Something to eat at such a place. Gert’s face was a study. The request suddenly reminded him he had had no breakfast, and he made a grimace which would have explained Smedley’s mistake about the baboon. Then he fell to feeling in his pockets, or rather, what remained of them, and finally fished out an inch of Boer tobacco. He regarded this dainty morsel with a look of yearning and affection, and then placed it on the white side of a broad leaf.

“Dat is all, sieur,” he said, apologetically, as he made this last sacrifice; and it was a great one for him. He had treasured up that last inch of tobacco for a smoke in the drowsy Sunday afternoon. Smedley dimly through his pain perceived something of the sacrifice. “I don’t chew,” he said, with a faint smile, “and I cannot smoke.”

Gert took the morsel up, pondered over it, looked at Smedley, then at the tobacco again, then put it back in his pocket.

He would have liked much to have put it in his mouth; but as he said, nodding his head gravely, “It is not goot for the man to eat when the baas is midoudt food.” Smedley had closed his eyes again, and his face seemed to be getting whiter.

Gert stood up and examined his position. He saw at once it would be impossible to descend down that almost perpendicular face of rock. He must either climb up or work his way laterally across the face of the cliff. First making a bed of leaves, he moved Smedley close against the rock, and then began, after his rough fashion, to set the broken arm. He scraped a handful of the soft woolly covering from the inside of the leaves to use as lint, and cutting two branches, pushed the bones into their place, and bound the splints around with strips of cloth from the sleeve, and supported the wrist of the maimed arm in a sling made with Smedley’s handkerchief.

The patient, aroused by the pain, watched the operation through without a groan, and even smiled when the work was done. That smile won the heart of the simple and rough hunter: it was a little thing, but it told of a brave

and kindly spirit. He went along the ledge determined to save this man's life, and to be his man, come what might. After a few yards the ledge widened out, and it was an easy matter for him to reach the top. Once there, he sat down to reflect. He had no money to buy food, no skins to exchange, and no credit with any one in the town for as much as a "tickey," or threepenny-bit. Why did he not go off immediately and say there was a white man lying helpless on the mountain? He had, from the first, made up his mind upon his course, and he meant to save the white man himself. He had come to the conclusion that the only way open to him was to beg or steal, and he rose up intent more upon the latter plan when he saw the search party led by Beyers come into view. He hid behind a rock and watched the party go searching along the town side of the mountain, then crept away to the gorge, where he concluded the party would have left their provisions. He was right; there, with some blankets and ropes, was a well-filled basket. He took away a bottle of brandy, some eatables, a blanket, and a rope, and to this day an unfortunate guide is under suspicion of having hidden the missing articles.

That night and the whole of the next day Smedley and his guardian spent upon the ledge, hearing occasionally the holloas of the search party, but not responding. On the third day Smedley was strong enough to venture along the ledge. His arm, roughly bound though it was, was properly set, and where skill failed, his vigorous constitution helped. He glanced down over the precipice with its sheer descent into the rock-scattered ravine below, then looked at Gert.

“Gert, do you mean that you climbed up there to save me?”

“Yah, *sieur*,” replied Gert, simply.

Smedley gave his right hand to the old hunter, and the latter knew, though no words were spoken, that the white man felt more than gratitude.

CHAPTER XII.

THAT IS THE MAN!

SLOWLY, with infinite care on the part of Gert, and with much pain to Smedley, they climbed the cliff in safety. When the cool mountain breeze blew upon him, the latter felt his veins tingle and his heart grow strong with the freshening life-currents. He drank in a deep draught of the keen, pure air, and looked down over the calm waters and up to the arching sky. It was good to live, good to come back from the brink of the grave into the glowing sunshine. Ay, it was a fine world—a great, bright, generous world, with the pleasant music of its winds and falling water, with the majesty of its purple mountains, the restfulness of its calm seas, and the glory of its unruffled sky; even the rocky mountain top was beautiful. He stooped and plucked a flower that grew at his feet, out of a crevice, a warm red flower, with soft petals. “*Sieur*,” said Gert, in the croaking tones of a raven, “how you come fall down there?” pointing with brown and shrivelled forefinger into the gloomy ravine that yawned at their feet. The beauty went out of the scene at the sound of those tones. How, indeed? Smedley blanched as he

looked down into the fearful chasm, but it was more from pain for another, than dread at the thought of his miraculous escape.

"I did not fall," he said, in low tones.

Gert looked puzzled for a time, then a curious expression crept into his wrinkled face, and he looked half fearfully at his companion.

"Sieur was tired. He did not want to live," he said, and put his old hand timidly on Smedley's sleeve. "Sieur es young, and he haf met mit troubles. Gert es old, he haf los' all—wife, chilluns, ebblyting." A tear ran down over those innumerable lines. The old man thought Smedley had planned his self-destruction, but the sympathy, eloquently conveyed though vaguely expressed, robbed the thought of its sting. Smedley felt drawn to the old fellow.

"No, Gert," he answered, gravely, "I did not throw myself down; I was pushed over."

"Allemagtig!"

"Gert, what would you do if your enemy were to take from you a thing you valued above life, and then tried to kill you?"

"Eh?" replied Gert, not catching the drift of this long question at once—"wot would I done if a man I don't like take from me sometings I like ver mooch, and den try kill me? Oh! wot would I do?" He pondered over this moral problem for some seconds, knitting his brow into a tangle of coruscations, and looking blankly into the sky. "Ah!" he exclaimed presently, drawing his breath in with a hissing sound, while his eyes gleamed again, "I would kill him surely. I would foller, und foller, und

foller him over der mountains und rivers, track him trou de veldt und forest, creep on after him from sun up to sun under, in der moonlight und der dark. May be a mont', may be a year, may be two, tree, six years, some time I fin' him. Den I creep, creep, creep while him lie by de dying fire, und den"—with a fierce downward thrust of his hand—"I kill him surely."

Was this the same man who, a minute ago, was subdued with sympathy and mute affection for his fellow? He moved in the excitement caused by his imaginary and relentless pursuit with stealthy steps like a panther, his eyes sparkled and snapped, while his nostrils expanded like the nostrils of the tiger when it sniffs the taint of man, and his fingers worked like the talons of the same cruel beast when they move in and out of their sheaths. Smedley looked up and marvelled. If an imaginary wrong could so stir this man up, what would he be like were he really harmed?

"Yah," still muttered the old man, "some time I fin' him, den"—with that significant thrust again through the air.

"Suppose, Gert," continued Smedley, "that the man who injured you were not your enemy, but your friend, and had a just claim to the thing you found?"

"Eh—wot?" said Gert; "no, no, no, not friend, no right, no right 'tall."

"I believe the old fellow is thinking over some grievance of his own," thought Smedley, "and I would not give much for the life of the man who has wronged him."

He set off slowly down the mountain, with a heavy

heart, filled with thoughts that troubled him, while Gert followed behind, scowling darkly and muttering.

The steep descent from rock to loose boulder and slipping shale jarred Smedley's arm, and a feeling of faintness came over him as he emerged from the gloomy jaws of the ravine. He sat down with his back to a large lichen-covered rock, and looked with a sense of utter desolation over the town. It was not the first time he had felt alone in the world, without a single tie to bind him to any one among the crowds who crossed his path, but never until now had he felt what it was to lose faith in a man whom he had taken into his confidence. He dreaded going into the town, because he would have to meet the man whom he had loved as a brother, and who had attempted his life.

"Dick!" he cried, "what devil could have possessed you!"

Old Gert stood aside, looking down on the white houses with his accustomed stolidness, but hearing the bitter cry, he approached Smedley with his hat in his hand as a mark of respect.

"Sieur, your heart es sore," he said. "Et es bad to sit und tink—baas must move, und de sore will pass away."

"A man cannot escape from his thoughts, old man."

"Dot es so. But ef a man do you hurt, you mus' not tink of de pain you suffer. You mus' sot your mine on der trouble you will give him. Den vos you all right."

Smedley smiled at this rather grim philosophy.

"Does sieur know dot man wot trow him down ter mountain?"

"Yes, Gert," replied Smedley, sadly; "I know him only too well."

"Dot was good. Come, *sieur*, let's catch him."

"I don't want to catch him, Gert. All I wish is, to let him know that I am alive, and then to try and forget him. I will go to America," he continued, speaking to himself; "anywhere out of this accursed place." He resumed his way down the winding path, and Gert followed behind, a tattered and forlorn object, with a dismal expression. He could not fathom the magnanimity conveyed in Smedley's last words, and thought that the pain and exposure had affected his head.

In the quiet gardens they met with few people, and reached the boarding-house without attracting attention. The front door was wide open, and Smedley paused a moment. He would have rather faced death than confront the friend who had, he thought, attempted his life; but it must be done, and with a painful contraction of the heart, he entered the wide hall, and passed up to Drury's room. At his heels silently stole the hunter, determined to stick to the man he had saved, yet amazed at the size of the house. The room was empty, but the portmanteaus and hand-bags were in their places; and a hat, that Drury had worn up the mountain, was on the floor.

Smedley sat down on a chair with his back to the door and his face to a large looking-glass, which would reflect the form of any one entering. Gert squatted in a corner. No one could have persuaded him that a chair was for such as he.

An hour passed slowly—painfully, and they had neither spoken nor changed their positions. A sterner look had settled like a shadow on Smedley's face, and

he listened now for each sound, and traced it through all its cadences, without the tremor that chilled his heart at first. Gert still squatted with his hat between his knees, but his eyes no longer ranged over the room from one unaccustomed object to another; they had fixed themselves upon a portmanteau in which the butt of a revolver shone brightly from its leather case, and had as much attraction for him as a diamond for a pretty woman. If by looking he could have done it, he would have drawn the weapon to him; but not being blessed with such ocular power, he was debating within himself whether he could get the revolver without being heard. He thought he could, and he did after a crawl that would have done credit to a cat for its patience and silence. In the corner he crouched once more, absorbed in examining the shining barrel and the revolving chambers, three of which were loaded.

In the complete stillness of that summer day the noise of a gate, slammed far down the garden, broke upon the air. Smedley stirred in his chair and fixed his eyes upon the glass. He heard the quick regular crack, crack, crack of feet upon the gravel-walk, then the ring of a heel on the stone porch, and the hollow sound as the boots passed over the polished boards in the hall, then the muffled thud as they pressed the carpeted stairs. He drew his hands over his face twice, and swept the sternness from it. "For her sake," he muttered, "I will give him one more chance." The steps came on quickly up to the door, then stopped suddenly. A minute elapsed—it seemed an age to Smedley—then the handle gleamed in the light as it turned, and softly the door was opened.

Gert, sitting there with his eyes fixed on the man he called master, saw him start, and heard the whispered words, like a sigh of great relief, "Thank God, it is not Dick!"

The mirror revealed not the frank face of Drury that he dreaded to see, but the black eyes, the pale features, and evil mouth of Foster, from which was dying a smile of triumph as he saw the room was occupied.

As Smedley turned in his chair and confronted him, Foster trembled, and his lips curled back under his moustache in a hideous grin of fear.

"Good God!" he said, hoarsely; then recovering himself by a violent effort, exclaimed, "I thought you were dead!"

He stood clinging to the door, while his dark skin took on a sort of greenish hue. If ever a man was stricken with fear, he was.

"You seem distressed; did you expect to find the room empty?"

Foster smiled and regained his confidence. "You must be alive; no ghost would convey a suggestion with such brutal frankness." After a prolonged stare, he crossed his legs and inspected Smedley with impudent deliberation.

"You look worn out. Not shaved for some days, and wear your arm in a sling. I hope nothing serious has happened. Your friend Drury alarmed us all by saying you had fallen over a precipice." All the time he was wondering how Smedley had escaped, whether he had any suspicions, and how the manuscript was to be secured.

"By the way," he continued, "your friend has left for Kimberley. Went off in a hurry, and asked me to send

on his baggage. Now you are back again I presume you will take that duty off my shoulders."

Smedley, with a heavy sigh, covered his eyes with his hand.

Foster smiled, he could have laughed aloud, and felt quite happy in the thought of his cleverness.

"Is there anything I can do for you, Mr. Smedley? You have not treated me well; but, damn me! if I like to be down on a man when he is left by his friend."

"Yes," said Smedley, sternly, "you can go." He half rose from his seat, but sank back again, tired out.

"Don't exert yourself," said Foster, viciously; "and since you are so deuced disagreeable, I will just fulfil Mr. Drury's request without any consideration for you." He entered the room and began coolly examining the boxes.

Smedley stood up, and pointed to the door. "Get out, you wretched scoundrel!" he cried.

"I won't!" said the other, scowling; "and you can't put me out; so sit down and be quiet, or maybe you'll be sorry you spoke." He clenched his fist and flourished it, feeling very brave now that his enemy was crippled.

As he stood there screwing his courage to some cowardly deed of violence, there was a shuffling movement on the floor.

"Holloa! what is that?" Foster cried, in amazement, as his eyes fell upon the bent figure of an old man, whose eyes glittered savagely out of his wizened face. "What in the devil's name is it?" he muttered, retreating a step. "Hi! Smedley, look at it—call it off—it's mad!"

Smedley looked at Gert, who was now crouching at the foot of his chair, and was struck by the strange working of the old man's face, and the fire in his little eyes.

The Hottentot pointed a lean yellow finger at Foster, and spat at him. "Who is he, baas?" he hissed.

"A scoundrel!" replied Smedley.

"Yah, I know; I saw it in his face—a schelm."

The old fellow glared at Foster, who was growing very uncomfortable, though he muttered contemptuously something about a scarecrow.

"Ah!" screamed Gert, suddenly, "I know—I saw him up the mountain that day baas was killed. *Sieur*," he continued, with a cry, "that is the man!"

Smedley started.

"Yah, it was he pushed baas off the berg—I can see it in his eyes."

Foster blanched and trembled. "Call him off!" he said, hoarsely.

"No, Mr. Foster, I will not."

Gert bounded to his feet at the name. "*Duivel!*" he cried, in Dutch, "now I know why it is you made me cold. Ten years I have waited since you took my little girl. Now you are dood!" He raised the revolver and pulled, but the hammer fell with a click upon an empty chamber, and Foster stood unnerved. Before the hammer could fall again, Smedley wrenched the revolver out of the old man's grasp.

Gert swayed to and fro like a drunken man, the foam on his lips. "Skit, baas—skit!" he cried, then fell to the floor in a fit.

"The old fool!" muttered Foster, wiping the beads of

moisture from his forehead; "he must be mad. I think," he added, with a desperate attempt at his old manner, "I will call again when the menagerie is empty."

"No, Mr. Foster, you will remain where you are."

Foster turned his head as he was going out and looked into the muzzle of the pistol.

"The next chamber is loaded," said Smedley, grimly.

For several seconds the barrel was held straight at Foster's head, and he could not withdraw his gaze from it.

With something of cruelty, Smedley held the other on the rack.

"That man accused you of attempted murder. I believe he is right, and I thank God," he murmured, "for the relief he has given me."

Foster moistened his lips, and tried to say that it was a funny thing to thank God for, but his voice died away.

"Yes," continued Smedley sternly, recalling Miss de Beer's warning, "you tried to kill me. It was you who stole my manuscript on board; it was you who induced Beyers to quarrel with me, and you planned some villainy in connection with a Malay dance."

At this shot, fired at venture, Foster started violently. He moved towards the door.

"What do you want?" he muttered.

"Only two things: first, your promise, as you value your life, to keep out of my way; and second, the scrap of paper you took from me on the mountain."

He breathed freely again. "I give you the promise with pleasure—I have no anxiety to meet you again. The paper I never had."

Smedley did not reply. He raised the barrel until it was level with Foster's eye, and slowly pressed the trigger. Foster, with dilating pupils, followed the slow movement of the bright hammer as it fell back to full cock. The slightest pressure would send it smash on to the cartridge.

He held his breath, and his knees shook under him.

"The paper!" said Smedley.

Foster made a vain attempt to speak; then motioned with a trembling hand.

Smedley lowered the revolver, and Foster took a roll of paper from his waistcoat pocket.

"Drop it!"

He did so.

Smedley drew it towards him and glanced at it.

"Now you can go."

Foster tottered to the door, fixed a glance on Smedley in which burnt the fires of hell, then with his hands against the wall went unsteadily down the stairs, and out into the air. He leant against the verandah post until his nerves grew calmer, then shook his fist and went off cursing under his breath. "He will be sorry he did not shoot," he muttered.

Smedley turned his attention to Gert, who was showing signs of returning consciousness. A drop of brandy brought him to his feet.

He glared around with bloodshot eyes. "Es he dood?—did baas shoot?"

Smedley shook his head.

"Wot!" shouted Gert, "did the duivel go?" he snatched at the revolver, but Frank held him off and locked the door.

The old man turned upon Smedley like a wild cat, but a single glance quieted him, and he crouched again muttering over and over, "Baas will be sorry he did not shoot."

CHAPTER XIII.

KISS ME !

SMEDLEY took up the quill which had nearly cost him his life, and drew out therefrom a roll of paper. He unrolled it eagerly, stretched it out, and looked for a plan of the locality where the treasure had been deposited. There was no plan, merely a line : " The Fossicker knows the treasure. Show him this, and if you can satisfy him that you have a right to Elton's share of the treasure, he will assist you."

That was all. It bore out what had been said by convict No. 46, but it was practically useless. Smedley felt very much as a person would who on receiving a large parcel, and after taking off each outer covering with increasing excitement at the prospect of some valuable enclosure, found nothing.

"Who the dickens is the Fossicker?" he said, irritably; "and where does he live? 'Pon my word, the clue is worse than none at all."

He walked up and down the room, relieving his feelings by launching savage kicks at a portmanteau each time he passed it. When he had given an unusually terrific kick, the portmanteau gave out an unmistakable groan, followed by muttered exclamations very much like a suppressed swear.

"Why, Gert," he said, pausing in amazement, "did I kick you?"

Gert was silent, but he rubbed himself in a way that was more expressive than speech.

“I meant to kick the portmanteau, not you.”

“All right, sieur; but if master wants to kick any more, let him kick sof’ ”

“What do you mean, Gert?” asked Smedley, laughing.

“It made me feel bad to see sieur kick dot nice new box. Better kick me.” The old fellow presented himself to be kicked again.

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed Smedley, stretching his lungs in hearty appreciation of the comical figure of the old hunter with his patched corduroys in the air, and his face wearing a resigned look of long-suffering.

“Baas,” said Gert, with an injured air, “et es good to laugh with a man not at him. My cloes is torn an’ oudt; I don’t klare if dey gets more torn; my skin is tough, and he can stan’ kicks an’ cuts same as I got up the mountain, but my heart can feel.”

“I won’t laugh at you again, Gert,” said Smedley, remembering that the old man had not once alluded to the service he had done, and he took the hunter into his own room, where he pointed to a gun and suit of clothes.

“Wot do mit ’em, sieur?”

“Take them—they are for you; there are cartridges for the gun—bullets for one barrel, shot for the other.”

“Take ’em all away?”

“Certainly; they are yours, to do what you like with.”

Gert took up the gun, squinted along the brown barrels, snapped the cocks, then put it down tenderly.

Smedley thought he was not satisfied, and offered him money.

Gert put the money away, though his eyes glistened at the sight of it. "Baas, want me take that gun and go?"

"Yes, Gert. It is a good gun; but if you would like something else, say so."

"Yah, it is a mooi gun, a right good gun; nefer did see a gun so fine," but he shook his head.

"What is it, Gert?"

"Sieur, I have been mit myself a long time, all alone by myself—wife dead, chilluns dead."

"Well?" asked Smedley, kindly.

"Well, sieur, you see it is this away: I belong to sieur, stay mit him, work for him, cook for him, shoot for him." He peered into the baas's face, but seeing no compliance there, went on in his jerky way. "Baas, I can shoot. Yah, I es a good hunter. Can foller the spoor quicker as you can run. I can groom horse, drive, cook, dance, drink—anyting—do ebblyting." He hoped this long string of accomplishments would secure him the post he wanted.

"If I wanted a man, I would take you, Gert; but I don't want one."

"Don't want any pay, baas—just food."

Smedley shook his head, and Gert assumed his blank walnutty expression. He gathered together the gun and ammunition with a simple "Dank you," and went.

Smedley felt lonely now the old man had gone, and he fell to thinking over Foster's story about Drury. It was possible of course that Dick had gone off to Kimberley; but he could not get rid of an uneasy feeling that Foster had been lying.

He went into the town and had his arm re-set, then returned to the hotel for much-needed rest, so far as it was possible for the body to rest when the mind was troubled. In the dark shadow of the mountain, in the silence of the evening, with the far-off murmur of the sea and nearer hum of the town borne to his ears, he felt the misery of loneliness. He had not had much time to reflect over the statement of Elton's death, but now he bitterly thought of the convict's story, and could find no hope of a brightening future anywhere.

So he sat while one or two guests went off, and another came and sat out on the verandah—a lady, he noticed, when his attention was called to her by a deep sigh. He could not see her in the darkness, but he could hear the beating of a fan, and even shared in the currents of air set moving.

The fan turned his thoughts in another direction, and he dwelt on his last interview with Miss de Beer, recalled her warnings and her emotion, and wondered if she had anything to do with Foster. He hoped she had not, for he was conscious of feeling some interest in her.

The fan was closed with a snap—he heard it fall to the ground—and then there was the faint sound of weeping, and he saw that the lady had bowed her head upon her hands.

He could not go without disturbing her, so he moved back into his chair, and turned his head away. Out of his own sadness he felt a strange sympathy with his unknown fellow-sufferer, and he began to speculate on the cause of her grief.

Presently, with a deep sigh, she rose, and leant on the

railing, so that her upturned face was in silhouette against the starry sky. Her lips were moving, and the words were carried to him in a murmur—

“ Those bells of Shandon,
They sound so grand on
The pleasant waters of the River Lee.”

“ Ah me ! ah me ! why do these unmeaning words haunt me so ? ”

Smedley started up and hurried forward. “ Miss de Beer,” he cried, with just a trace of joy in his tone.

She turned, looked towards him a moment, and swayed.

He put his arm around her, and her head fell back on his shoulders, with the perfumed hair brushing his cheeks.

For a moment he thought she was acting ; then, bending down, he noted the closed eyes, and the deathly pallor of her face gleaming through the shadow. With but one sound arm, he could only stand and support her, hoping she would revive without his having to summon help.

Soon he felt the return of consciousness. The heart began to throb, the colour came back to the cheeks, the lips opened, and the eyes too for a moment, then closed. He could feel the heaving of her bosom, and about her lips he thought he could trace the dimples of a smile. Her warm life, the beating of her heart against his, the perfume and the soft touch of her hair aroused in him a thrilling emotion.

She sighed softly, as if in sweet content, and he answered with a sigh.

“ Frank,” she said, opening her eyes suddenly, so that they seemed to flash, “ is it you ? ” The words were sweet and low.

"Yes," he answered softly, out of pity.

"Kiss me!"

He stooped, and pressed his lips on her forehead.

Then she leant on his arm, looking up into his face, never speaking, her eyes glowing, and her lips parted.

At last she stood off, and put him away with her hand on his shoulder, and spoke softly.

"Ah! I will remember this night, Frank. I had thought you dead, and your spirit seemed to come to my call, so that I was frightened, and behaved foolishly. But you will forgive me?"

"I should not have startled you so," said Smedley, waking as from a dream.

"Tell me, what became of you?"

He told her all, and she went to his side with a low murmur of pain, placing the tips of her finger gently on his injured arm.

"And I thought you were in Kimberley, Miss de Beer?" said he, recovering his composure.

"I was on the way," she said, sighing, as she noted his formal manner; "but I saw a report in the paper that you had been lost on the mountain, and dreading some foul play, I returned."

He thought a moment. "You have twice warned me against that man Foster. Can you tell me how you became acquainted with his movements?"

"Ah! why do you ask me? I cannot tell you," she murmured, in distress.

"Is it not a pity, Miss de Beer, that you should be in the secrets of that man?" he said, gravely.

"You do not know!" she cried. "I hate him! but—"

but he has power over me—and surely,” she continued, with a sudden change of manner, “you cannot blame me for telling you what I had divined of his intentions, for he did not tell me he meant to do you wrong.”

“I am grateful, Miss de Beer; but the fellow is such a scoundrel, and it is insufferable that you should be friendly with him.”

“Friendly!—God forbid! He has ruined my life, and the lives of others. I am sometimes sorry that I am not of the stuff of Lady Macbeth, for then”—She stopped and wiped her eyes. “A minute ago I was in heaven, now I’m in hell—hell, ‘the vision of a soul on fire.’”

“My dear young lady,” said Frank, soothingly

“Don’t,” she said, “it hurts me. Some day, perhaps, I will tell you how it was Mr. Foster secured some influence over me by treachery—some day, if I may hope to meet you again. It is a wretched, wretched story—a wretched story,” she murmured, then asked him quickly if he had seen the convict.

“Yes.”

“What did he tell you?” she said, opening her fan.

“He told me that Owen Elton was dead.”

She gave a slight cry.

“Dead!” she whispered; “did he tell you Owen was dead? Poor boy!” She hid her head and wept quietly, then lifted her face as though she had made a sudden resolution.

“Owen is not dead!” she said, firmly.

“What?”

“Yes, he is alive.”

“Good Heavens! where, Ida?” That was the first

time he had used her Christian name, and the sound of it seemed to produce an instant effect. All the resolution died out of her, her head sank, and her voice trembled.

"I—I—don't know—he is up in Mashonaland. There now!" she continued, almost hysterically, "don't ask me any more. I know he is alive." She rose up and held out her hand. He took it, and felt how cold it was, when but a few minutes ago it had been so warm.

"I am afraid you are not well," he said, gently.

"Good-night," she murmured; "I am a very weak woman, but I could not bear your contempt."

"Why, Ida," he said, speaking to her as if she were a child, "you have spirit enough, I should think; and as for fearing my contempt, that is nonsense. You have lifted a load from my heart with the news you have given me, and I will always hold your name in grateful remembrance."

"Always!" she murmured. "Yes, you must always think kindly of me; but what of Owen?"

"I will find him in Mashonaland," he said, gaily. "You will be the first to see him on his return, and to receive our thanks."

"His thanks—in Mashonaland!" she murmured. "Ah, yes! Don't you hear those bells?—ah! good God! they will drive me mad!" She burst away from him and disappeared, leaving him standing amazed.

Early next morning he went straight to the convict station, acting on an impression which Miss de Beer's strange remarks had produced, and there saw the Superintendent.

"The other day," he said, going to the point at once.

"you permitted me to have an interview with convict No. 46. Singularly enough, he was able to give me important information, but I omitted to learn his name?"

"Let me see—I remember his coming. He was sent down on a charge of illicit diamond buying, and his name was given as Henry Field."

"Was given as Henry Field? Do you think it an *alias*?"

"I have no proof that it is, or is not; but it appeared to me once or twice, I remember, that he showed surprise when addressed by that name."

"May I see him?"

"Certainly, if he will see you."

A constable was sent off to inquire, and came back with the message that No. 46 emphatically declined to see any visitor.

"We cannot force him, Mr. Smedley," said the Superintendent, with a smile. "By the way, I must congratulate you on your escape from the mountain. How is your friend?—you and he will have a bad impression of Capetown."

"What do you mean? My friend, Mr. Drury, has gone to Kimberley."

"Gone to Kimberley! why, man, he is in the hospital, and as near death's door as a man can be."

Smedley drew back aghast.

"Didn't you know? I am sorry, very, to have spoken so, and I exaggerated his injury. There is a cab outside."

In a few minutes Smedley was by Drury's side. He was led up to the bed, one of a row of one uniform

pattern, and each alike in carrying its sufferer. Broken limbs and wasting diseases claimed their victims among those pale and hollow-eyed shadows of the vigorous world without, and yet silent though those rooms were, and shut off from the busy currents of life, the struggle with grim death was not fought out alone, and the groans and sighs reached far into homes, where a mother or a wife watched with straining heart-strings for the issue which would decide the fate of the sufferer on the far-off hospital bed. Smedley sat down at the head of the bed, while the soft-footed sister who had taken him there raised a warning finger to him as an order to be quiet, and left him to his gloomy reflections. Drury tossed in an uneasy sleep, and the contraction of his mouth showed that he felt the pain from his wound. He muttered, too, words in a quick, breathless way, and bending his head, Smedley knew that his friend was thinking of him. He took the hand that was bared by the tumbling of the bedclothes in his own, and held it gently as though he had been a woman. He sat there long like that, and the sister, going by, gave him a glance of sympathy and approval out of her calm grey eyes—eyes that would have brightened up any home. "I would like to have that man for a brother," she said to herself. Ah! good sister, it would be well for your large heart to feel a grasp more tender than the grasp of a brother, and drink of the love that is deeper; but it is well that there are such as you to tend the sick.

Drury woke out of his uneasy sleep suddenly, sitting up as he opened his eyes, and whispering, in a constrained voice, "They have killed him! He would never leave me!"

"Dick, dear old boy," said a well-remembered voice in

his ear, and a strong hand pressed him gently back upon the pillow. Drury looked up long and silently, then slowly passed his hand over the other's bent head.

"It is you, Frank. I am not dreaming, am I?"

"Pinch me, old chap; you will find that I have substance."

The very ghost of a smile played about the sick man's mouth, and he breathed a sigh of relief. "Your ugly face makes me feel stronger already; but what the dickens has happened to us both?"

"We must not talk. I am your nurse now, and mean to be strict."

"Strict, be hanged! If you know anything of medicine, which you don't, you would know that it is a bad thing to keep a patient in a state of suspense. I am in a state of suspense, and if you don't relieve me, there will be a case of suspended animation."

Smedley gave an account of his misadventure, which he toned down, making out that he had met with an accident, but not disguising Foster's appearance at the boarding-house.

"The villain!" muttered Drury. "The unutterable scamp! Well, Frank, you and I are a couple of flats to be hoodwinked by such a vulgar rogue as that."

The sister came hurrying up with a reproving look, and told Smedley that he had outstayed his visit, and was exciting her patient.

"Don't bully him, sister," said Drury, with a glimpse of his old roguish look; "he means well."

Smedley rose to go, and Drury looked after him wistfully, then beckoned him back.

“Frank,” he said, with tears in his eyes he was too weak to keep back, “I thought you were dead, and you can tell how I felt. I said something to you on the mountain—forget it, and think well of me again, old friend; I take it all back.”

Smedley pressed the hand held out, and left, bitterly remembering that he had been unjust to his friend in harbouring a fearful suspicion. He could atone for it, perhaps, by helping Drury in the search, and taking him quicker back to Miss Elton; for had not he just taken back those wild words spoken in haste, and renounced that fleeting sentiment for Miss Beyers? He went back to his rooms and thought long and gloomily over the task they had taken in hand, and he began to regret that he had not forced Foster to tell him everything he knew about Elton, for he felt convinced that something was known to that man. Already a month of the time allotted for the search had gone by, and it seemed that several months would elapse before Drury was in a condition to go on a journey; while he himself with his maimed arm was scarcely fit for a rough trip in the interior.

CHAPTER XIV

ON THE TRACK.

YET in a month the two friends were in Kimberley, fitting out a light mule wagon for their expedition. Their strong constitutions had enabled them to throw off the effects of their injuries, and their experiences had made them more watchful of others and closer friends than ever.

Drury still dreamt of happy hours with Sannie Beyers, but he kept his hopes to himself. Of his buoyant nature he had already mapped out the future up to a certain point. They would find Owen Elton, discover the treasure, and reach Capetown in good health. Then he would avow his love for the sweet Dutch girl, and leave to Frank the happy task of restoring Owen to his father and sister.

Smedley had no such silver horizon. He had searched the roll of deaths, and therein found the name of "Owen Elton." "So then the convict was right." Well, he would keep this knowledge to himself till the search was over, for it was better that Mr. Elton should live in hope than that his life should be cut short by a message of death.

When their tent wagon was well loaded with eatables, trenching tools, ammunition, they set out from the mining camp one moonlight night. Gert, the old hunter, held the reins, and a sulky-looking bastard flourished the long whip. Gert had renewed his appeal for a post, and Smedley had taken him on, much to the old man's delight. The two friends rode "salted" horses, wiry ponies which had passed through the horse-sickness, and they rejoiced that at last they were moving on into the interior.

They camped that night on the banks of the yellow Vaal, beneath some willows. When after supper around the open fire they climbed into the wagon, where a mattress of buckskin throngs formed a soft and springy bed above the boxes, they found a large basket of fruit with a perfumed note attached.

"To my friends. May your quest be short and successful. Let hope be your guiding star, and do not trust any one."

"Humph!" grunted Drury; "highly romantic. Who can she be."

"Miss de Beer," said Smedley, the faint perfume from the writer's paper recalling to him that scene on the verandah. He could not suppress a sigh.

"I did not see her in Kimberley; did you?" asked Drury, with a suspicious glance at Frank.

"No; nor heard of her. I would judge that the import of the message is in its ending. You remember her warning at Capetown?"

"Yes, by Jove! but Foster has disappeared. At any rate there is no one to distrust here, and what we have to do is to eat this fruit with grateful thoughts of her."

They journeyed on to the De Kaap diggings first of all, thinking to work from thence northward through all the alluvial fields; for the Fossicker—meaning a man who fossicks or scrapes about among rocks for gold—would presumably confine his attention to surface-workings.

Their mission was soon the common property of the scattered camps. They had no time to prospect for gold, and the apparently aimless trackings of a mule wagon from place to place in desperate hurry aroused at first the curiosity, then suspicions, and finally the ridicule of the diggers. When they had been two months on the road "the Fossicker" had become a proverb. "Do you know the Fossicker?" was a sarcastic rejoinder to any one who asked for impossible information. When either of the friends approached some canvas canteen, and opened his mouth to put the usual question, the chances were that some brawny-armed, bronzed digger would take the words out his mouth, and ask him if *he* knew where "the

Fossicker" might be hanging out, and who the devil he was when at home.

A new drink, compounded of various "poisons," was unanimously christened "The Fossicker," because no one knew what it was made of. One miner at Mac-Mac gave a characteristic reply. "Do I know who the Fossicker is? Well, mister, take my word for it, you may as well search for a powder-flask in hell as for a cuss with a name like that, which fits any one who handles a pick."

They went on to Pilgrim's Rest, where there was the remnant of a camp, with a few diggers scraping among the boulders for the monster nugget which never revealed its beauty.

When they outspanned a half-score weary men slouched up, and stretched themselves on the parched ground to hear the news, and sip the steaming coffee which the customary hospitality demanded.

"Do we know the Fossicker?" said a grizzled old fellow with one eye. "Which partikler Fossicker may you want?"

"I did not know there were more than one," replied Smedley.

"You thought there was only one, eh? Wot was his name?"

"I really don't know."

"Well, that's funny, isn't it, mates?"

"Damned funny!" was the unanimous rejoinder, while the men studied the friends, letting their eyes range slowly over every particular of dress and accoutrement.

"There was a chap named Walker here once—maybe his name was Walker—Bill Walker?" continued the old fellow, squinting at Smedley.

"Very likely," said Drury; "he must be fond of walking, I should think."

"Ah! hunted him much?"

"Have not got on his trail yet," said Drury, handing over his tobacco pouch, a monstrous one made out of a rattle's skin, to the nearest digger, who filled his pipe and passed the pouch on.

"So. Well, this yer Walker was this way 'bout a year since. Came with a fellow named Smith. Did your man know a chap named Smith? Don't know! These two fossicked about here some, didn't they, boys?"

"They did so," muttered one of the boys, with the shadow of a smile; "scratched about like a barn-door rooster upon the hill. They were greenies."

"Yes, that's them. Green as grass after a thunder-storm; that's what made me think they were known to these gents. Understand?"

"Quite," replied Drury, good-humouredly. "Birds of a feather flock together. What about Walker?"

"What! Bill? Oh, he messed about on the hill with his chum, then they started business in the camp. There was more life in the old place then; it had an hotel in those days, which stood just about this very spot. Many a time I got a skinful of good liquor here—many a time. Maybe you've not got such a thing as a drop o' Cango about?"

Drury sent Gert for a jar of Cape brandy, and soon every man was contentedly sipping out of a tin "beaker," or mug.

"Bill Walker," continued the reciter, smacking his lips, "he took to cutting grass on the flats, and sold the

same to chaps who kept horses. Smith, he held a commission sale in the camp every afternoon. *He* didn't pan out much. Things he sold was mostly revolvers, and there was no one to buy them. He might have made a matter of a shilling commission each day, but Bill he cleared a clean half-crown. He got on so well he took to employ labour, and had as many as two blacks cutting for him. One day the Field Cornet comes by and hails Bill. 'D'ye know Zarny?' he says. 'What, good old Zarny, what keeps the hotel? Rather,' says Bill, sorter interested. 'Well, he's dead,' said the Field Cornet. 'Poor chap,' says Bill, 'he was a good sort.' 'He was that,' says the Field Cornet, quickly, 'and I want you to bury him.' 'What, me?' says Bill; 'I never buried any one yet, and I'm not going to start now.' 'Now, Bill,' says the other, 'you know I would not give this job to any one. You do it, and I'll give you a sovereign.' 'Well,' says Bill, 'I will; he was sich a good fellow.' So Bill up and buried poor old Zarny—buried him deep, so's the jackals shouldn't have him. Two days after this, when Bill was cutting grass again, for his sovereign had melted, the Field Cornet rode up again."—The old miner filled his pipe, took a coal from the fire, cradled it in his hand, and coaxed it into the bowl.—"The Field Cornet came riding up again. 'Holloa, Bill,' he says, 'd'ye know old Zarny?' 'Yes,' says Bill, 'God rest him. I planted him for you all right.' 'Well, I want him dug up again, and you're the feller to do it; there's something suspicious about his death.' 'Not me,' says Bill, 'I don't mind burying a man, but I'm not going to get him up; it ain't the thing.' Bill was always

kind-hearted. 'I'll give you five pounds,' says the Field Cornet. 'Of course,' says Bill, 'if there's been any foul play, I'm for finding out how it was done. I'll get him out. He was a good fellow, was old Zarny.' Well, Bill he hired two niggers, and stood away, for it was powerful hot, until they dug him out. He got the five pounds in the shape of a note, real Bank of England, and he lived on it—him and his mate—for six months. Am I right, mates?"

"Six blooming months they lived on that fi-pon' note," growled the others.

"How did he do it? Well, you see, he goes into the hotel and orders this, that, and the other, and when he and his mate has eaten and drunk, he flops down the fi-pon' note. 'Can't change that,' says the host; 'must chalk it up.' It got about that Bill had this fortune about him, and fellows used to pay him a tickey or, maybe, sixpence to feel it. When a fellow was down in the blues, Bill would go down to his tent and let him look at that bit of flimsy. He would rattle it, and talk soft, and tell the fellow that maybe if he stuck to his work, *he* might get a fi-pon' note himself. Bill was always good that way. One day this picnic came to a stop. Bill was getting extravagant, and every day he treated the crowd. This particular day he did that same, and as per usual he flourished that note about in a sort of swaggerin' way, when the barman, a new fellow, he jas took it up and stuck to it. 'What's the meaning of that?' says Bill, getting shaky in his knees. 'The matter is, my boy, that you owes the till some fifteen pounds, and the sooner you take to burying people the better for me.' Poor Bill! that flustrated him com-

pletely. He faded away there and then, and was buried on the flat by Zarny." The old chap tossed off the remainder of his brandy, and winked his one eye.

"Now, what has that got to do with the Fossicker?" asked Smedley.

"Nothing—nothing at all, only as yer are so mighty ignorant about the man you want, I thought, maybe, you're not acting fair and square. Now, come, gents, be you police?"

"Good Heavens! Now, what makes you ask that?"

"Why, everything. You mean to tell me you're not after the Fossicker for the job he done in self-defence up country?" and the old digger looked fiercely at him.

"No, certainly not. We are his friends."

"Who sot you on his track, then?"

"Henry Field, now in prison at Capetown."

"Don't know him," said the miner, gruffly. "Boys, I allow they were right in forewarnin' us 'gainst these chaps."

"We come on behalf of one Owen Elton," said Smedley, seeing that the suspicion of the miners was against them.

"That is better," said the miner. He whispered with the others.

"See here," he resumed; "we agree you look right, though you act green. We do know the Fossicker, and a right good man he is. He was last heard of at Dead Man's Creek, at Zoutpansberg, near the Limpopo. Isn't that so, Scotty?"

Scotty, a red-headed, hard-featured Scot, nodded his head. "He left his mark there, sure enough," he added, with a significant nod.

This was not detailed information, but it was all they could get, and it was the first inkling they had yet received that there was such a person as the Fossicker.

CHAPTER XV

DEAD MAN'S CREEK.

It was a depressing place Dead Man's Creek, up away among the crags of Zoutpansberg. Not a tree or a bush covered its brown sides, while its bottom was pierced with pits and scarred with races, where miners had searched for gold. A few broken dollies, the remains of a sluice, and an old whim were all that remained of a once busy camp. It was a blind creek, dry as a bone, except after a storm, when the water poured down off the baked sides of the valley as from a roof, and flooded the workings. A jackal stole out of one of the abandoned claims, and paused on the brink of the hill to look back upon a mule wagon, which creaked complainingly as it bumped over the boulders. A vulture soaring out of human sight saw, too, and came circling down, emitting a harsh cry. The presence of that wagon meant food, in some shape or other, to those scavengers, probably in the shape of offal, possibly in the form of dead mules, or of dead men. The jackal turned its shifting yellow eyes upon a grim thing lying behind a boulder, then with a wailing cry slunk off over the ridge. The mules hauled the wagon on to a level place ringed about with the marks of tent trenches, and the driver laid aside his long whip and began outspanning. He was a villainous-looking half-

caste, with a flattened nose and small evil eyes. After hobbling the mules, he looked curiously about the desolate valley, then mounted to the wagon box, where he helped himself from a large earthenware jar labelled "Cango," and inspected the interior of the wagon. He had often before made such an inspection, as a servant who was not permitted to enter under the white tent, but now he looked in with the air of a man who expected to become proprietor, and one, too, who contemplated great enjoyment from his possessions. The sight that met his gloating eyes was no doubt tempting to him. The arched canvas roof was covered with pockets filled with hunters' requisites, while strapped to the ribs were a rifle, fowling-piece, cartridge belts, and hanging therefrom a lamp, and festoons of "biltong," or jerked meat. Two handsome karosses made from the skins of the silver jackal covered the bedding, which was arranged on a foundation of cases filled with clothing, groceries, and Birmingham goods, for presents to natives.

The man unstrapped the rifle and loaded it, then he took another nip of brandy; after which he stood on the wagon or driver's box, and, shading his eyes, looked up the side of the brown valley. "Good," he said, when by and by he noticed a man coming over the ridge far up on the right. "Good, I will have him this time, and then inspan and off again before the other fools come up." He laughed softly, as though at some good joke, then climbed down with the rifle in his hand, and dodged among the boulders. He did not go far, not above twenty yards from the wagon, and then he jumped into a shallow hole.

There he made himself comfortable, with his ugly face

above the ground, and his rifle pointed towards the wagon. He glanced along the barrel once or twice, then fixed his eyes on the figure advancing towards him. Murder was what he meant—murder of his master in cold blood for the sake of gain, yet he waited there as unmoved as though he had been watching for game. The jackal came back from his trip over the hill, and sat down on his haunches like a dog, the only witness of the crime.

The coming man walked on wearily, his gun crossed over his shoulders, arms upraised, and resting over stock and barrel, and hands hanging limp. He paused now and again to look back, as though expecting to see some one following, and once sat down on a rock for a few minutes, while he examined the valley below him. The half-caste in the hole chafed at this delay, and grow uneasy “Blast him!” he growled; “why don’t he hurry? Those others will be coming up.” Once he brought the rifle to bear on the coming man, and put up the sights, but he hesitated to pull the trigger. “Might miss again, and he won’t think it a mistake this time. There, he stops again!” he added, with a fierce oath.

Five hundred yards away the oncomer had paused suddenly, and then, turning out of his path, went slowly down into the bottom of the creek, where he stood intently examining some object. The jackal howled again, and at the wailing sound so near him the half-caste started violently, then shut his jaws grimly “Ah!” he muttered, “it is a sign that some one must die.” He crept out of the hole, and wormed himself along like a huge snake, leaving a broad trail in places where he brushed through the gravel tailings from the workings.

He reached a large rock, paused a moment to recover his breathing, then slowly, inch by inch, raised his head until his eyes glowed like coals above the top.

A few yards off the man was standing looking down at something at his feet ; but the murderer never paused to see what engaged his victim's attention. He stood up, rested the rifle on the rock, placed his finger on the trigger, and his eye on the back-sight ; and thus prepared, with devilish cruelty, called out, so that he might see and enjoy the fear in the face of the doomed man.

At the call, the other turned his head slowly. It was the face of Frank Smedley but browner, graver-looking, and more worn. As his eye fell upon the dark muzzle pointed straight at him, there flashed before him the image of Foster held in agony at the muzzle of a pistol. He threw his head up a little proudly, and then fell prone upon his face, while the sharp report of the rifle rang down the valley. The murderer stepped hastily up to the fallen man, looked a moment, and fled, glancing wildly back over his shoulders from time to time. He gathered the mules together, inspanned them, and drove out of the valley, using his long whip with savage ferocity, born of fear. That glance had shown him his master's face down on the stones, the blood trickling from a hole in his neck, and his arms spread out over the bleached bones of a human skeleton, whose grinning teeth and hollow sockets turned his blood to water. That desolate place had been rightly named Dead Man's Creek.

An hour after the mule wagon had rattled out of the valley a solitary horseman entered, and drew rein where the wagon had stopped. It was Drury, who had evidently

been after game, for he carried a gun slung across his shoulder and a stembuck fastened behind the saddle. He was riding a wiry Basuto pony, which showed signs of having been knocked about, and now endeavoured to reach a few dry blades of grass. He dismounted carefully, and limped down to the creek bottom, where he looked eagerly in the holes for a drop of water, but not finding any, clambered painfully into the saddle again, and followed slowly along the track last taken by the wagon, which to his inexperienced eyes was faintly marked. He looked back from the ridge into the valley with a puzzled expression, then urged his tired but plucky horse with a shake of the reins, and disappeared. The valley was alone with its dark secret until dusk, when yet another figure came up along the trail at a steady pace. He also carried game—a young duiker—which he flung to the ground, before he climbed on a large boulder to give a loud halloo. The call went booming up through the silent valley, but he listened in vain for the answering and welcome cry that was to guide him to the camp. He called again and again, then climbed up to the ridge, and looked anxiously through the deepening gloom for the glow of fire or the twinkle of the lamp. “Verdom!” he muttered, “dis is bad. Vere in tunder haf dey goned?” He fired two barrels into the air, and listened for full five minutes, then went down to where he had left the duiker. There he sat puzzling over the mysterious disappearance of the wagon, and of his two masters, who should have been at that spot hours ago, but he could hit upon no satisfactory explanation of their failure to keep the rendezvous.

The distance from the last camp was short, and the road could not be missed. Even if the two white men had wandered away in hunting—and he had warned them not to go too far from the route—the wagon should be there. He had risen to go back upon the trail to see if the wagon had broken down, when the roar of a lion, perhaps a mile off, warned him that he had better look to his safety. First he carried the duiker off, opening its veins to let the blood flow, and left it in an open spot.

“Dere, Mynheer Leuw, dot es better as some old tough Gert, midoudt any juices. You jes’ leaf me alone mit myself, und I don’t bodder mit you.” He then went back, and searched about the creek until he came across a dolly, which he split up in readiness for a fire. A part of the old whim also came in useful. So far, so good. He waited again till he heard the lion speak, then stretched himself calmly on the ground for a sleep, with the remark, “Two, tree hours before he come along here.” Before he closed his eyes, the darkness had rushed over the land, blotting out objects within a yard.

Old Gert went off into a deep sleep, from which he awoke with a start, and grasped at his gun instinctively. The silence was profound—too deep to be reassuring; and with a shiver he put a match to the dry splinters. The tiny flame flickered, died down, then caught hold, and crept swiftly up from stick to stick, until a bright quivering tongue of flame leapt several feet on high.

He looked uneasily upon the bright faces of the rocks which gleamed out of the circle of light, ever widening and contracting, then drew a deep breath, and sat down with his gun across his knees. He dared not sleep again.

There was something to be dreaded in that unnatural stillness, and he longed for some sound, even though it was the roar of the lion near at hand. He sat on like this, feeding the fire sparingly, for he had not much fuel, until an hour had gone; then the displacement of a stone opposite broke the silence and relieved the strain.

"Goot!" he muttered, "dere is de leuw." He bent his head to the ground, and distinctly heard the deep breathing of the lion, as it sniffed the strong taint from the blood of the duiker. Several seconds elapsed before any other sound reached him; then a continuous growling made the air vibrate.

"Myn Got!" the old hunter whispered, uneasily, "dere is more as one. Yah," as a faint whisper reached him, "et es a family." He put another log on the fire, and cocked his gun, at the same time placing a large knife between his teeth. He listened to the snarling and crunching of the bones with a grim look on his scarred face. Very soon the feast was done, and the former intense silence filled the valley again. Gert drew a stick from the fire, and threw it high into the air. It went whizzing through the blackness, scattering sparks, then struck the ground; as it fell a terrific roar broke forth, like a thunder-clap, making the very ground vibrate. As if this had been a signal agreed upon, a babel of sounds broke out, above all ringing the wailing cry of jackals. Gert crouched with his back to the fire, and tried in vain to pierce the gloom, his nerves steady as steel. Soon the horrible din subsided into a long guttural sigh, as the lion drew in his breath, and the old hunter once again felt the stillness oppressive. Half-a-dozen times he put his finger to the trigger to break the

stillness with a loud report, but he restrained himself each time, and as a substitute at last gave a loud halloo. A low growl answered him, succeeded by a sound which made his flesh creep. It seemed to him a human cry—a hollow moan, as of some one in pain.

“Wot is dot?” he cried, hoarsely; then, clearing his throat, called out aloud, “Who es et?”

Another savage snarl and a chorus of cries from the jackals came in reply, succeeded again by the mysterious groan.

He heard it distinctly this time, and wiped the sweat from his brow, while his teeth shook.

“Dere es sometings up dere dot make de leuw und der jackals ’fraid. Wot es et in dur duivel’s name? Allemaglig!” he cried, suddenly, “dis es der Dood Men’s Valley.”

He pulled his coat over his head and shivered, for the unknown was full of terrors. All the time, through his coat, he could hear the awful moaning at intervals, and to his horror the sound increased in volume. At last he could bear it no longer, and snatching up a brand from the fire, rushed off up the side of the valley opposite that on which he had left the duiker. Half-way up, he paused to look down, impelled by a terrible dread that something was following him, and his eyes fixed themselves on a strange object, which gleamed white from the intense darkness. As he looked, another roar broke the stillness, followed by a brilliant flash of fire and a loud report.

Gert waved his hand aloft, and dashed down, yelling, “Baas! baas! I come.” He recognized the ring of his master’s rifle, and his fear left him that moment. In his

haste he tripped over a rock, and went flying head over heels, alighting full upon a crouching lion, the lighted brand burning into the back of the royal beast. With a fearful roar the lion bounded away, and when Gert picked himself up, with a succession of muttered oaths, a voice challenged him.

“Is that you, Gert?”

“Yah, baas, what is lef’ of me.”

“Thank God! Where are you?”

Gert groped towards the advancing steps, and felt for his master’s hand, which he caught and patted. “Ah! my master; my heart es glad.”

Smedley pressed the old hunter’s hand in return. “You came in good time, Gert; but let us get to the fire. I feel weak.”

“Yah, sieur, come; but,” he added, in a subdued voice, “wot es dot ting?” pointing to the white object, which still gleamed with a strange shifting light near by.

“Never mind that, Gert; come to the fire.”

It was time, for the roaring broke out again. They reached the fire, and Gert piled on some more wood.

Smedley looked about inquiringly.

“Where is the wagon, and Mr. Drury?”

Gert went on piling up the sticks, and said nothing.

“Gert, where is the wagon? It was here this afternoon.”

“How comes sieur by hisself?” asked Gert, putting a question, instead of replying.

“That rascal Klaas shot at me, and I suppose left me for dead.”

“Ah!” said Gert, “I toll baas dot man was bad.”

"You did, Gert; but that does not explain the disappearance of the wagon and of Mr. Drury."

Gert said that when he arrived in the dusk he saw no sign of the wagon, and intimated his suspicion that the morning would reveal evidence of treachery.

Smedley sat gazing into the smouldering embers, a prey to gloomy thoughts. His face was haggard in the extreme, stained with blood, and still bearing traces of the terrible shock he must have sustained when returning to consciousness in the black night, with that fearful form beneath him. He had been foiled and baffled at every stage, and now he dreaded to think on what the morning might reveal.

"They told me," he said, "I would end my search in the Dead Man's Valley. They meant it as a grim joke, no doubt, but it has been nearly fatal to me. And Drury—where is he?" He stood up, and cried aloud, "Dick! Dick!" and out of the shadows came a moaning echo.

"Sleep, *sieur*, sleep; to-morrow before the sun is up we must follow on the spoor."

"Not before we have found Mr. Drury."

"I tink, *sieur*, he haf gone on after de wagon."

"Why?"

"Else was I see his horse, and de leuw would be eating dot horse."

"Gert, do not give me any hope unless you are certain."

"Yah, I es sure," said the old hunter, simply. "And baas must sleep, for we must walk far."

"Wake me early, so that you can sleep in your turn."

"I's tough, baas; want no sleep; but I will call you soon enuf."

Smedley felt no disposition to sleep, but he knew it was necessary, and stretched himself out. Very soon his regular breathing showed that nature had her way, and Gert was left to his own thoughts again. He turned over in his mind the events of the evening, and the treachery of the half-caste, and came to the conclusion that they would have little chance of finding Drury alive, supposing the latter had, as he believed, followed the wagon.

"Dot fool half-caste," he hissed, tapping his gun, "tink ole Gert es no account; wait er bit, and ole Gert will cotch him to-morrow, surely." After this he lit a pipe and smoked; then he wondered why it was the lions had gone off so suddenly. He rose up, stretched himself, walked a few yards into the darkness to drag up another log, when a threatening growl, almost at his feet, made him retreat. He raked up the embers in haste, took a coal out, blew upon it, and then threw it in the direction of the sound.

By the brief light he caught a passing glimpse of a crouching lion not ten yards off.

The fire would, he reckoned, die out in half an hour, and then it would be time to waken his master to face death again. It was a terrible situation, and in the next few minutes, while one by one the coals were crumbling into white ash, the old man made up his mind that if the lion was going to spring, it would be upon him. He cocked both barrells and waited. He could hear his heart beating wildy, then the movement of the brute's tail, as he swung it to and fro, and next he heard stealthy foot-

steps passing round to the other side, and knew that there were two lions. The footsteps paused, a low guttural sigh came from one side, and Gert felt the supreme moment had arrived. He flung a handful of powder on the last coal; there was a hissing, a brilliant flame, and by its light he marked the great beast crouching right before him, and threw up his gun.

In that instant a moaning noise came sighing down the valley, and Gert's fingers faltered on the trigger. The lions, with a whimper of fear, moved off, and a wailing cry, growing fainter and fainter, showed that the jackals were deserting their stations on the ridge above.

Gert, trembling in every limb, looked fearfully behind him, and saw a spectacle which froze the marrow in his bones.

There, moving towards him, was that fearful form; white with a strange whiteness, that grew now dim, now bright, it came slowly towards him, hovering about the boulders, searching in the sluices, disappearing in the pits, and appearing again without disturbing a stone. It remained several minutes in one deep chasm, and Gert was feeling his blood stir again, when, with an awful moan, it again emerged, and came gliding straight towards him. He tried to call out, but the cry was strangled in his throat; he wished to pull the trigger, but his muscles would not obey the feeble command of the numbed brain. The form paused before him, a shapeless column of diaphanous light, surmounted by a livid head, pierced through the centre of the forehead with a bullet-hole. There was a strange likeness to Drury in the awful face; and when Gert in his horror saw this, he gave a wild cry, and fell forward over his sleeping master.

CHAPTER XVI.

DRURY MISSING.

WHEN Smedley was so unceremoniously aroused from his sleep, and found a heavy weight pressing upon him, he was naturally alarmed, and scrambled to his feet in all haste, tumbling the insensible Gert into the heap of ashes. The night at that time, in the early hours of the morning, was at its blackest, and there was no sound whatever to reach his listening ear, beyond the melancholy sighing of the cold morning wind. He stirred Gert with his foot, and in response the old hunter groaned—

“Ah! goot Meister Spook, leaf me alone.”

Smedley lifted the old fellow up, but he struggled and slipped away, placing his hand on a coal which still glowed amid the white ash. Feeling the pain, he sprang up, yelling, “Myn Got! he has trow me into de hot place,” and was preparing to run, when Smedley held him, and called his name.

“Eh!” he said, wildly; “es de sieur here, too?”

“Of course I am—where do you expect me to be?”

“Wot! I ’spect baas was up dere in de valley where I lef’ him.”

The old man was silent for some time, and Smedley felt him reaching about blindly. Then he opened his eyes, and muttered as if to himself—

“My! et es a dark place. Baas?”

“Well?”

“Es you here?”

“Yes.”

“De meinister say dat hell was all fire, eh ?”

“Yes.”

“Well, how comes it so dark ?”

Smedley laughed loud ; and Gert, satisfied at last that he was really on the earth and in the flesh, went to sleep.

In the few minutes before the first flush of dawn, Smedley sat watching and thinking over the repeated breakdown of all his plans. Fatality seemed to dog his footsteps. His mission, which he had hoped to keep secret, had become public property : it had been detected on board by Foster ; it had in some mysterious way been bruited about the country, and he had been the joke of the whole mining population in the Transvaal since leaving Kimberley three months before.

His thoughts turned to the skeleton lying there all uncovered, with its hollow eyes looking up to the sky, and its forehead bored through, murdered, perhaps, as he might have been ; and at the thought that his bones, too, might have been left there to bleach in that awful loneliness, nameless, unmourned, unrecognized, and unburied, he felt that he had been wonderfully spared. He touched the wound on his neck, where the bullet had cut the skin, searing it like a hot blade, and causing a dizziness which had made him fall on the rocks.

When the valley was suffused with pink, as the first sunbeams shot through the mist, he made his way to where the grim skeleton was stretched, mutely demanding burial, and reverently covered it with stones.

He offered up a silent prayer that the heart of the mother who was now, perhaps, waiting in some distant home for the return of this wanderer, whose journeyings

on the earth had long ceased for ever, might be comforted, and went back to Gert, himself feeling stronger and more hopeful.

Gert had watched his master performing these last simple rites over the unknown dead, and with a shake of his head, and a look of fear up and down the valley, he took up the spoor of the wagon, and quickly climbed to the ridge above, where Smedley joined him. They stood here for several minutes, leaning on their guns, their shadows thrown far out in fantastic giant-like shapes upon a heaving sea of mist, which rolled away towards the west.

Solitary peaks rose out like islands, their rocky heads gleaming bright above that silent sea. Presently an eagle broke through the veil, the sun sifting through its mighty wings, and with a shrill scream of exultation at its power, soared away and away, growing smaller and smaller. Then, with a slow flapping, came through the mist from that mysterious hidden world below vulture after vulture, and went sailing off in a long line, cutting the air with wings outstretched, after a few downward beats of their fringed plumes. After them a string of cranes, drawn out in line also, went flapping heavily, their long legs stretched out like rudders, and each one in turn taking up the melancholy call of "Conk, conk." A golden oriole flashed out like a flame of fire, then a flock of parrots whirled out and disappeared again, followed by a grey falcon, for all the world like a shoal of flying-fish skimming the waves before the rush of a barracouta. With that dash of the hawk after its prey, the business of the day began. That sea of mist, soft and beautiful,

covered a world where every creature was in dread of some other. The two men watched the scene with different emotions. Fresh from his recent solemn occupation, Smedley looked over the sheeny, shifting, silvery expanse, impressed with its beauty and calmness, and weighed down with a sense of his own littleness in the face of such majesty of space, such dignity of peace brooding over the sleeping land.

Gert, on the contrary, with a hunter's eye, marked the flight of the birds, and tried to guess from their flight whether they were after prey or not.

"Ah!" he said presently, pointing to the vultures which had begun to fly in gradually narrowing circles above the mist some miles away, their wings gleaming like tiny specks of silver as they caught the sun, "dere is someting dead below yonder. Yah," he added in an undertone, as he plunged into the mist, "someting dead. I know well et es baas Drury."

The track of the wagon, marked plainly enough on the stones and hard ground, led down on to a plain covered with patches of mimosa thorns. Here the small hoof-marks of the mules were distinctly visible, and there, too, Gert silently pointed out the larger spoor made by Drury's pony.

There was an old wagon track leading across the plain; the mule wagon did not keep it very long, but turned off towards the north, where a broken mass of mountains arose.

"Ah!" said Gert, opening his mouth for the first time, and pointing to the mountains which loomed out through the melting mist, "we fine him dere."

The old man looked to his gun to see that all was right, then strode on, his glistening eyes shifting perpetually from bush to bush, while Smedley followed, asking no questions, and content to trust his companion, who could read the signs of nature as easily as he himself could read a book.

As they tramped on, the mist died away, and the sun shone from a cloudless sky. A small shadow, bird-shaped, swiftly crossed their path, followed by another and another. Gert pointed up to where the vultures sailed majestically overhead, their bare necks turned on one side, and said, in a grave voice, "Baas, you mus' stop here."

"Why, Gert, do you see anything?" asked Smedley, anxiously.

"Yah, *sieur*," replied the old man, solemnly; "I see death! The baas mus' stay here, and by and by I will come back and tell him."

"This is not a time for foolish words—tell me plainly what you mean."

Gert pointed up to the vultures.

"Vultures," remarked Smedley, scornfully, "after dead game."

"Yah, sir, dead buck maybe—maybe dead ox, dead horse, dead man. I don't speak foolish words," he added, dropping the butt of his gun to the ground, and looking up at the carrion birds; "but ef baas es ready to go on first, let him go."

"You are not afraid, are you, Gert?" returned his master, oblivious to the warning which the old man tried to convey.

"Yah, *sieur*," replied Gert, simply; "I es frightened to

see wot lies dead by dot old dry tree over there. Klaas haf lef' his handwork there."

Smedley knew now what the old man was driving at. He shuddered, and grew deathly pale, then murmured, "Come, Gert, let us see."

"My master," said the old man, and placed his hand touchingly on his master's sleeve. The action conveyed, more than words, a profound sympathy and affection, which would ward off an impending blow if possible.

Then silently they approached the withered tree, rising from a mass of tangled thorn-bushes. The assvogels, alarmed lest these new-comers would rob them of their spoil, flew closer and swept along rapidly.

A jackal stole out of the thorns, and, with a complaining howl, slouched away to a distance, when he sat on his haunches. As they neared the bush a few blue-flies whizzed by with a dash, and others hummed restlessly about the spot.

"Et es newly dead," muttered Gert, sniffing the air. They both paused irresolutely before they reached the bush, and Smedley turned his eyes to the blue vault with a fervent prayer that he should be spared the agony of finding his friend dead. Gert slipped from his side, and walking softly, as though he feared to wake the dead, passed round the bush. A moment he stayed, then called out in a tone which lifted the load from his master's heart.

There, stretched on its side, with its throat torn and body half eaten, was Drury's Basuto pony, the saddle and bridle still on; but the swift, fearful glance Smedley cast around showed there was no trace of his missing friend. He looked questioningly at Gert, who stood with his hand

over his mouth, a sign with him that he was thinking deeply.

“Wot does baas tink?” he asked, suddenly.

“I think that the horse has been killed by wild animals, and that Mr. Drury has escaped.”

“Where gone?”

“Perhaps he has gone in the wagon, or made his way after it.”

“So, baas knows many tings, but he es a chile in the country. No, sieur, dot horse was shot. Klaas shoot him. He wait over der behind dot ant-hill, while baas Drury going long for de wagon. He killed de horse, an’ den”——

“What then?” said Smedley, watching the old man’s face intently.

Gert stooped down and picked up a piece of burnt wad. “Den, sieur, baas Drury pick himself togedder and shoot back, and dot schelm Klaas run for de wagon. Come!”

They walked over to the ant-hill that Gert, with an old warrior’s eye for an ambush, had fixed upon, as though he had seen the whole thing happen, and there Smedley found sure evidence that the tragedy had been played out as described. Behind the conical-shaped mound of brick-like earth, reared by the patient labour of the white ant, was an old smasher that Klaas had worn, with a bullet-hole through the crown. Gert picked it up and thrust his fingers through the hole. “Der next bullet,” he muttered, “will go trou his head.”

He looked back to the bush where the horse lay, and following the route Drury would have taken had he kept

on, saw a clump of bushes to the left, where he decided the wagon must have halted.

“Klaas make fire by dem bushes, and when baas Drury come riding along anyhow, he shoot. Perhaps de baas sleep in dose bushes.”

Smedley, with this hope held out, could not walk—he ran; and Gert, after a shake or two of disapproval at this speed, followed at a rapid pace.

They reached the trees together, found the remains of a fire, but no trace of Drury, beyond a footmark in the ashes, which showed that he had been there. Gert searched about, and came to the conclusion that Drury had followed on after the wagon, which had been driven off at a sharp gallop, as he could tell from the way the track swerved about, and the deep impress made by the mules.

“Et must haf been one hour, maybe half-hour ’fore sun-down, when de wagon start from here, und four or six miles from here he must outspan. We haf no time to spare, then.”

They stepped out doggedly through the dry grass, the track stretching before them in two wavy lines, perfectly distinct for a long distance, as the sun struck on the grass beaten down by the wheels. Now and again, a herd of springbuck, with that peculiar craze they have for crossing the path of an enemy, would bound before them, swallowing the distance with enormous leaps. The more stolid blesbok raised their heads and gazed, turning their white faces with a regular motion, as though they were all fixed on one neck. A knorhaan every hundred yards or so bobbed his head up and down, and scolded them in language which lends itself peculiarly to profanity of the most

emphatic kind ; and clouds of long-legged, white-winged "kee vekies," the pest of the hunter, circled over their heads, calling out the cry, from which the name is taken, with mistaken zeal. The hot sunlight, reflected from the burning ground, quivered like steam, so that objects at a distance lost their fixity.

They kept on without a word, their features somewhat grimly set, giving an index to the fixed and stubborn resolution of the mind. They had covered a mile or two when Gert suddenly stopped, and stooped to pick up something from the grass. It was the stump of a cigar, smoked down to the point where the glowing end would begin to scorch the moustache of the smoker. He held it up with a smile, then searched the ground again, and with a grunt of satisfaction picked up a burnt match. "Dere, sieur," he said, with the triumph of a man who reads a problem not suspected by another, "Master Drury sat down here and smoke."

Smedley took the rejected stump, examined it with interest, as though it was something uncommon, and put it away carefully in his pocket.

"He cannot be far off. Come, Gert, we'll be up with him soon," and he stepped out with renewed vigour, and a joyous look in his face.

"Wait a bit, sieur ; wait a bit !" muttered Gert, going on his hands and knees, and searching at the roots of the grass. "Ah, I tought so !" he said, presently ; "he haf sat here till the dark come, den wen he go on again, he miss the wagon. See, he wos go off dis way"—pointing to the left—"and by and by we fin' he wander about so as a drunken man. Dot es so."

He mused awhile, looking over the veldt, and Smedley stood by, impatiently waiting for the next decision. But the old man did not speak, and he had to rouse him with a reminder that there was no time to lose.

"Yah, sieur, I know; but I don't like it. Baas Drury cannot go far; he was lame, and tired, and hungry. He sleep anywhere; make no fire; keep no watch. Plenty wild beastises about."

Smedley frowned, and said sharply, "I have had enough of this croaking, Gert; you go on and do your duty."

The old man, whenever scolded, lost his look of age and sentiment, and became alert, but silent. Now he strode off, picking up the spoor as a pointer follows the taint of a partridge through the grass, and in less than twenty minutes pointed to a depression beneath a thorn tree, made, he said, by Drury.

There was the hole which the young baas had carved in the soil for his hip to settle comfortably. Then Gert made a cast round, and a startled exclamation drew Smedley quickly to his side.

"Leuw," he said, briefly, pointing to some long scratches made on the ground. "He stand there—angry, roar, and tear the ground. Him wild." He spoke in a low voice, as one would in the presence of the dead, and looked round as though expecting to see something he dreaded. The sun gleamed brightly upon some object a few yards off, and, hastening forward, he picked up Drury's rifle, the stock bitten right through, and the barrel stained with blood. With a coughing sob he threw it away.

This repetition of the morning's ordeal was terrible

agony to Smedley. Beads of perspiration gathered on his brow ; he felt a feeling of suffocation at his throat, and a sense of numbness. But he brought his rifle to the ready, and advanced hastily towards some low bushes, influenced by an overwhelming impulse. Before he reached it, the bushes parted, and a huge lion, his mane bristling, leapt out, and stood roaring. Blood and foam were issuing from his mouth, and dripping from the coarse hairs below his lower jaw. His brawny chest was flecked and spotted, and his eyes were red. As Smedley faced this image of incarnate rage and savage strength, a strange emotion passed through him ; every individual nerve and fibre felt the thrill of the terrific roaring, and quivered, making his whole body tremble ; then he stood as calm and fixed as a rock. He brought his gun up calmly, and aimed steadily at a spot of brown between the gleaming eyes, and pulled. The bullet struck on the slanting forehead, and glanced off after cutting through the skin, and he heard it flying through the air with a "pinging" sound. Gert heard the unwelcome sound, too, and stepped forward just as the beast, recovering from the stunning blow, sprang at Smedley. He fired at the yellow mass ; the ball, passing upwards through the chest, pierced the heart, and the great brute was already dead when it fell upon Smedley, knocking him to the ground as though he had been a blade of grass. When they examined the lion, they found that his hind leg had been broken, and that he was bleeding from several wounds in the jaw and back of the throat. Searching among the bushes, they found Drury's revolver, all the chambers empty, his hat, and fragments of his clothing, but not a trace otherwise.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FATE OF THE DRIVER.

OLD Gert would not search for Drury ; neither coaxing nor threats would make him stir. To all of his master's alternate bursts of storming, and appeals to his better feeling, he gave one reply—"Baas es dood."

"Why do you say that?" said Smedley, fiercely. "There is nothing here to show that he is not alive. He may be now lying wounded near by, where you could quickly find him."

"No, sieur, et es no use," replied the old man, stubbornly.

Smedley left his servant, and went off aimlessly into the trackless veldt.

"He follows the shadow," muttered Gert, "but I must keep by him, else he lose himself."

He cut the whiskers from the grim and bloody jaws of the lion, which he preserved as a charm to make him brave, then went slowly after his master. Thus for the remainder of the day they wandered over the plain, and when the night came on the master turned to his man with a look of hopeless despair.

"Yah, sieur, he haf gone," said Gert, solemnly. "Maybe," he added, turning his wrinkled face to the sky, "he look upon us now, and his voice come like the wind, calling out, 'While you stay here, dot man Klaas escape.' " Vengeance for the death of Baas Drury was the first and last thought with Gert ; but his master's heart was filled with a sadness and pain that left no room for the fierce and baser

feeling. Yet after they had rested, and while the dawn of the next day was crimsoning the east, he told Gert to take up the wagon track again. The old man, like a sleuth-hound upon the trail that was to end in death, kept on unflaggingly, bearing away to the right until he struck the track, then keeping on straight up into the ravines which divided the mountains. He looked neither to the right nor to the left, marked not the majesty of the rocky heights, nor the beauty of the clouds which encompassed their rugged heads. His thoughts were on the treacherous half-caste driver ahead, and his eyes were glued to the wheel tracks. They breasted the first hill, and from its top the rough wagon road could be traced, moving like a dull thread along the face of a long precipitous valley; but there was no gleam of a white-tented wagon.

Gert looked at the track and shook his head, while a shade of disappointment darkened on his face.

"He drive hard; he haste, haste, haste. He is afraid of der stillness 'mong dese hills."

"Do you think we can overtake him?"

Gert pointed to an eagle, which shot into the air and skimmed the mountain top. "When he es after a hare he don't twist, an' double, an' turn, but just shut his wings, and fall like an arrow."

Smedley knew that the old fellow was turning an idea over, and waited in patience.

"Sieur, here is a plan: you follow long the track—et es plain ter see. I go dis way," pointing to the left across the valley, "and cut him off."

"Have you been here before?"

“No, *sieur*.”

“Then how can you tell that the road does not bend to the right, instead of to the left?”

“I know *dot es* all right. After *de* road climb from *dis kloof* he come 'gainst *dot* mountain—the top you see of him. So the road must cross over. *Yah*, I know.”

Smedley said nothing further. He had learnt to trust in the natural gift and instinct of the old savage. He shouldered his gun, and continued along the faintly marked wagon track, while Gert, with the activity of an Alpine guide, ran down the valley, and could soon be descried by his master scaling the opposite side. He reached the ridge, looking like a blade of grass outlined against the sky, and disappeared while Smedley was still traversing the winding path. The latter went on in gloomy silence, moving his legs mechanically, his mind too busy with painful reflections to appreciate the grandeur in the mass of rocks piled up above him. At one bend in the road he came upon a group of baboons—a family party, from the huge and hoary patriarch, with glistening fangs exposed, to a baby in arms; and the dread his sudden appearance caused to the youngsters and female members of the family made him smile. The mothers snatched their young from the ground, and leapt chattering up the rocks, the little ones hiding their faces, lest they should see the hideous form of this preposterous two-legged monkey with a white face. The patriarch looked fierce, and surlily kept his side of the path; but Smedley had no idea of molesting the old chap, and peace was maintained. The little incident served to lead his thoughts to surrounding objects, and a brighter look came into his grave brown

eyes, and a sunnier feeling into his heart, as he watched the bees hovering about the flowers, and listened to the joyful calls of the birds. While in this observant mood, he noticed at his feet a little pellet rolling swiftly on along a patch of dry ground, and looking closer to see the motive power, found a black beetle much smaller than the ball. Presently another beetle, an idle, worthless fellow, spied this treasure rolling towards him, and backing into the path stopped its motion, and then coolly trundled it off on his own account. The rightful owner, taken unawares, fell on to his back, his feet violently kicking in the air. Smedley gave him a help, and set him right side up, and the gallant little fellow, seeing his property disappearing, gave chase. Having the use of four legs, he overtook the robber, a great hulking fellow, and went at him like a scarabæus Tom Sayers. After the second round the thief was defeated, and the rightful owner, with a cheer from his human spectator, went merrily on his way.

Smedley laughed a fine deep musical laugh, that cleared the mists from his eyes and the shadows from his heart. He was within an ace of giving way to gloomy despair, and the beetle saved him.

When the winding road led him to the ridge, he found that he had a far-stretching view to the north-east away to the Limpopo. Beyond lay the hidden treasure and the unknown land. The sight stirred him somewhat, but did not thrill him as it would had he not been told that Elton was dead, and had Drury been by his side. The treasure, he hated it—had it not lost him his friend? As he looked, the dim mountain and the

vast tumbled plain between disappeared, and in his mind's eye he saw instead the stretching downs of Dartmoor, and the lonely vicarage with its sad inmates, waiting patiently for the return of a brother, a son, and a lover.

How could he go back to Miss Elton and say to her mute inquiry, "Your brother is dead, your lover also; but see, I bring you gold"? He could not, he told himself, in terrible agony at the thought; yet he knew all the time that he would have to face the task, and carry it through. Drury's death—if he were dead—placed Miss Elton utterly beyond his hopes. She, he felt, would treasure the name of the man who had died for her brother, and would count it a disgrace not to be faithful to his memory. He locked up the love he felt for her—at least he thought he did—and threw the key away.

"I will do what I can," he muttered, "though, God knows, it will be but little, and then"—Ah! he did not care to think on the dark possibilities of the future, when his duty would be fulfilled, and he would have to go his way, and she hers. He heard again the hopeless ring of the convict's parting words, "It will be better so, but my last object in life has gone"; and he fell into a reverie about No. 46, speculating upon his broken and ruined life, when a sharp rifle-shot recalled him to his senses.

Far away to the left he noticed a white spot on a hillside, and taking his glass from the case slung over his shoulder, examined it attentively. He started as he looked, and held his breath, then shut his glass hurriedly, and went off at a run. He had seen the wagon leaping with tremendous bounds down the side of the valley, and

the mules tearing round the bend. Some terrible catastrophe had happened.

Gert was right in thinking that the road bore to the left. When he reached the top of the valley, he saw the track winding in and out among ravines, water-worn, on the precipitous face of the next kloof, and set off along the ridge above the road. At first he thought that the task was hopeless, but presently could scarcely repress a shout of exultation, as a sharp bend in the track below showed him the wagon travelling slowly. Two miles away the opposite ridges of the kloof drew together, leaving a narrow defile, through which the road passed along a perilous ledge. Gert saw that if he could reach that defile first he could stop the wagon, and away he went at a swift pace, notwithstanding his previous exertion. After the first mile, noticing that he had got ahead of the wagon, which was still crawling along, he steadied down to a walk. He wanted to recover his breath, so that he could shoot steadily when the time arrived, for he meant to carry out his threat of putting the ball through the head of Klaas. That little plan was upset by a troop of rheabuck, which sprang up at his approach, and made off towards the road, clattering among the loose stones. The noise startled the drowsy driver below, who looked up in alarm from his seat on the wagon-box, and caught a glimpse of Gert before the latter had time to conceal himself. That glimpse was enough. Klaas shook the reins, called to his mules, and Gert heard the sharp rattle of the wagon moving rapidly. Caution was no longer of any avail; he sprang to his feet, and a hot race for the ravine ensued. Gert had the advantage at the outset,

since he could make a bee-line on a slope to the desired spot above the narrow defile; and he maintained the lead, shouting as he ran, waving his gun above his head, and at times in his mad excitement leaping into the air.

Klaas presently saw the defile, and seeing at a glance that he could never get through it alive if the approach were commanded, took desperate measures. He stood up, wielding the long whip, making the lash whirl through the air, and then brought it down with stinging force upon the mules. These, unused to such treatment, squealed with rage and pain, and with a desperate plunge that tried the strength of the harness dashed away, sending up a shower of pebbles which rained upon the driver. The wagon rolled fearfully, threatening now to bump against the stones on one side, or to plunge over into the ravine on the other. But Klaas was a superb driver; he twisted the reins round his wrist, braced his feet against the board, and kept his almost mad team under some control; still he could not take his eyes off his leaders. He did not know where his enemy was—could not for one second glance up to see if the deadly rifle were fixed upon him—and the sweat broke out upon his forehead, and poured down in streams over his face. Ah! in five minutes he would be up to the defile; and he gave a sigh of intense relief. But the next glance showed him how frightfully narrow the ledge was, and how terrifically deep the yawning gulf beside. At the pace he was going destruction was inevitable. He stood up, and threw his whole weight upon the reins. The mules saw the danger, too, and with snorts of alarm, and ears cocked forward, lessened their speed. Klaas breathed freely, and ventured to look for his enemy.

He laughed when he saw Gert hopelessly out of the running, and jeeringly called upon him to hurry.

This was too much for Gert. He drew up, panting heavily, threw up his gun, which he vainly tried to steady, and fired. The bullet whistled harmlessly over the other's head.

Klaas laughed mockingly, and, with his head to the mules, continued to taunt and jeer at the old man. That pleasantry cost him his life; for while he laughed, the mules, not liking the ledge before them, and not feeling the guiding hand, halted and backed.

Gert saw this first, and before Klaas could get his stubborn and frightened team to move, the old hunter had reached a broad, flat rock which overhung the defile. There he sat down to recover his wind, and waited, fixing his gleaming eyes upon the yellow face of the doomed driver.

Klaas saw that he was cornered, but he by no means thought of giving in. He held Gert in contempt, and believed he could fool him with ease. So he swore at his mules, and brought them on at a walk until the leaders were just under the rock. Here he pulled up, and began a talk.

"Good day," he said politely to Gert, as though he had seen him for the first time. "Will you come and ride?"

Gert did not reply.

"You look tired and hungry; come down and eat. You are thirsty; come and drink."

Gert was thirsty; his throat was dry, painfully dry.

Klaas saw the old man moisten his lips with his tongue, and he ostentatiously drew forth the jar of Congo. He searched for a pannikin, and the gurgle of the liquor, as it slowly gushed from the narrow neck, reached the ears of the old man.

Klaas held the pannikin up, then raised it to his lips, and slowly drained it, finishing with a resounding smack. He filled it again, and held it towards Gert.

"Come, old man," he said, "let us talk. If I have done wrong, we will tie the mules up, and fight with knives. The best man will take the wagon. Come and drink first."

The wily rascal could not have made a proposal more likely to be accepted, and he knew it. He grinned maliciously as he saw Gert rise to the bait.

"That is right," he added, as Gert began to climb down; but as he spoke he gathered up the reins, and with a hissing sound encouraged the mules to move. The leaders, accustomed to the narrow ledge, at once answered to the call, and the wagon began to roll.

Gert saw that he had been fooled, but he could not use his gun.

"Good-bye, old monkey," said Klaas, grinning up at his baffled foe; "we will meet again."

Gert hung a moment to the rock above the road by one hand, and letting his gun slip, with the other he drew his hunting knife from its sheath, and dropped to the road. The near wheel of the wagon would in a second have crushed him, so little room was there to spare, when the wheeler, frightened by the sudden descent of the old man, swerved, straining the trace, and turning the wheel a foot

from its course. The knife flashed through the air and cut through the trace, which struck against the heels of the wheeler, causing it to plunge. The off mules pulled, to escape being pushed over the krantz; and the wagon, drawn only from one side, swerved completely round until the hind wheels hung over the brink of the yawning chasm.

The mules, terrified, plunged and kicked. Klaas shrieked out to Gert to save him. It seemed as if in another moment the wagon, mules, and driver would go over the brink. The wagon was held from falling back by the single trace.

"Jump!" cried Gert, at the same time aiming at the straining trace. He fired; there was a tearing noise, the trace broke, and the wagon went slowly over the brink. It struck a stone, and leapt a hundred feet; struck the ground again, then bounded right out into the air, turned completely round, scattering the contents far and wide, and with a terrific crash was smashed into a thousand pieces on the rocky bottom.

But what of Klaas? As the wagon disappeared, he was jerked from his seat to the road, the reins being still twisted round his wrist. Before he could regain his feet, the mules, terrified at the crash, started off at a mad gallop. There arose a wild, despairing shriek above the clatter of hoofs, and through the dust and cloud of pebbles Gert saw the body of the wretched driver bounding like a ball at the end of a string, now in the air, now drawn along the ground, now tossed from side to side.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“ TREK BOERS.”

WHEN Smedley arrived at the scene of this fearful tragedy, he saw Gert down in the ravine below searching for the scattered valuables which he prized so much; and he, too, climbed down, spending the remainder of the day gathering such necessaries as had been spared in the general ruin. One stout demijohn of brandy they found miraculously embedded in the fleshy branch of a euphorbia; and out of two thousand cartridges, they were fortunate enough to pick up one sound case holding five hundred. By patient search they gathered up a little coffee and a few pounds of compressed vegetables and a seven-pound bag of flour.

They camped in the valley that night, and in the morning shared their treasures evenly, securing them in lambskin and leather pouches and water-bottles, according to the nature of the things.

Then they climbed up to the topmost ridge, and Smedley took his position. He found they would have to steer to the east, and called Gert's attention to a bold mountain which stood out like a sugar-loaf far beyond the Limpopo.

“ Baas will go on, then ? Why for ? ”

“ Yes,” said Smedley, speaking his thought ; “ there is only one thing left, and that is to find whether there is any truth in this story of the treasure, and of the existence of the Fossicker.”

“ Where will the baas go ? ” asked Gert. “ Hunt elephant ? But no, baas has no wagon.”

"I am going beyond the Limpopo—that river there," pointing to a long, sinuous streak of mist in the distance, hanging low; "far beyond—I know not where."

"All right; where the baas goes, there goes Gert."

They moved on steadily all the day, till they got into the lowlands, where, mindful of the danger they had escaped before, they made a slight kraal of thorns against lions.

So they kept on through mimosas, until on the seventh day they knew they were near the river from the rankness of the grass, which reached above their heads, and the numerous mud-holes about, the remains of the wet season, when the broad river, swollen by myriads of rushing torrents, had overflowed and spread far over the flats.

Here they were tormented by swarms of mosquitoes, plagued by flies, sweltered by the moist heat, and overcome by the noisome exhalations from stagnating pools.

On the broad stretch of sand and dried mud on the river's bank they found a party of Boer hunters—five men, with dogs and blacks. They were resting, and had evidently been working far from their camp, for the dogs were tired.

They looked darkly at Smedley as he came up, and made no response to his salutation.

"Can you tell me the nearest ford?" he asked, courteously.

There was no response. The Dutchmen stared at him from under the brims of their felt "smashers," and puffed at their pipes.

Smedley repeated his question, and one of them made a remark in Dutch, whereat the others laughed.

“Come, baas,” whispered Gert, “they are ready to quarrel.”

Smedley had seen many Dutchmen; some of them had treated him gruffly, bidding him begone from the farms; others had taunted him, a few had been hospitable, but none had attempted any injury. He was loth to believe that white men so far inland would ill-treat a stranger, since it was to the evident interest of all hunters and travellers to assist one another.

He moved away therefore but a short distance, and set about preparing a meal, a simple task as regards the firewood, but rendered remote by the absence of something to cook.

He looked around, and about one hundred and fifty yards down the river was a paauw drinking. Sighting straight for it, he missed, and the Boers jeered him; but as the bird, disturbed, rose into the air, he picked up Gert’s rifle, and dropped it dead.

“De Englander can skit,” shouted Gert, boastingly, as he ran to pick up the big bird.

“Come here, you verdomde Hottentot!” said the Boer who had raised the laugh at Smedley, when Gert returned. “This country is ours, and that bird belongs to us,” he continued, as Gert went by unheeding.

“Drop it!” he shouted; “you won’t—eh!—all right.” He flung his Winchester to his shoulder, pulled the trigger, and the bird fell to the ground, cut through the neck, while Gert held the head in his hand.

The men laughed at this, as though it had been an excellent joke; and the marksman, proud of his deed, rose up, and strode to pick up the paauw.

Before he reached it, Smedley took up the bird, and

handed it to Gert. His amazement at the outrage had given way to anger, and he was determined at all hazard to protect his rights.

"You devil—you Englishman!" said the Boer in Dutch, and Smedley knocked him down with his head in a mud-hole.

The others, with angry shouts, jumped up, and rushed on the solitary Englishman. They overpowered him, and gripped him by his arms and neck.

"Drown him! Tie him to a tree! Give him the sjambok! Shoot the rooinekker!" were the cries, as they hustled him this way and that—the man who had been knocked down dodging round the swaying men, and aiming savage blows, which, luckily, did not get home.

As they struggled thus, there was a triumphant yell, a report, and a bullet whistled over their heads.

The Boers broke away, startled, and saw Gert with a rifle in one hand, and a pile of others at his feet. The black servants were flying through the grass.

Smedley, seizing the opportunity, sprang forward, and joined Gert, picking up a rifle.

Three of the Dutchmen slunk off; the others began to parley.

They were very sorry, they had meant no harm, and were only joking. If Mynheer would be friends, they would be glad to help him.

Gert explained, and at the same time urged his master not to trust—"Les' soon as they get their guns, they would shoot us like dogs."

"I will keep up the joke," said Smedley, grimly. "Let us first dine off that bird, and then I shall be glad of your

company to the ford. Until then I will mind these rifles, lest they should go off unexpectedly." He kept watch with a loaded gun in his hand, while Gert quickly plucked and roasted the paauw.

The Dutchmen stolidly accepted their share, and when every vestige of the bird had gone, Smedley rose, requesting them to lead the way, which they did, at once going to the west.

"That won't do," said Smedley; "I will trouble you to go the other way."

"But, Mynheer, the nearest ford lies this way," pointing in the direction their companions had taken.

"And so does your camp, eh!—and your comrades with rifles; no, we will go the other way. Two of you will do, thank you."

After a brief consultation among themselves, two of the Boers set off down stream, and in half an hour they reached a bend in the river, where the eddies testified to the shallow state of the water.

"This is the place," they said.

"Cross over there before us."

"But there are crocodiles, and we must have rifles to protect ourselves."

"We will see to that. Be quick, please, else your friends may come, and in the firing you may be shot."

The men thereupon waded in, and Smedley quietly placed all the guns belonging to the party in the shallow water, while he and Gert followed behind.

They reached the farther shore without difficulty; and then the Boers, with scowling faces, returned somewhat quickly, and were soon joined by the rest of their party, and

by one fresh comer, who immediately opened fire with his unwet rifle.

Gert wished to retaliate, but Smedley restrained him, and they quickly pushed on, through the river bush, and on into the thick grass and far-reaching belt of marshland, a dismal waste, wearying and oppressive.

Fortunately they could see the conical peak in the distance for which they were steering, and so contrived to keep a fairly direct track, though frequently having to twist and turn to escape pools and dense clusters of reeds, the retreats of hippopotami.

It was unlikely that the party of Boers would follow them into the marshes, and they took no heed to cover their spoor; but when the darkness came on, they saw the gleam of a great fire on the left, miles away on the highland, possibly, as Gert suggested, the fires of the Gasaland Zulus.

They were two days in the marshes and rank grass, and when at last they got clear of the obstruction, and could see before them, and feel the firm ground beneath them, they were almost too worn out to rejoice at their release. But after a rest and sleep in the shade of an acacia, they were cheered by the sight of vast herds of game, and Gert, stealing up, shot a fine Impala antelope.

They camped by the body, and, building a kraal, remained there for five days, making biltong out of a young buffalo they shot, for they wished to preserve their ammunition. Smedley's feet had suffered most; but out of the buffalo hide Gert made him a rough pair of veldschoens, and he himself designed a pair of gaiters.

When they started on the sixth day, they were different men to the listless beings who had emerged from the marshes, dragging their feet. Now they were alert and active, and advanced with a swinging stride through park-like country.

The game had been very uneasy the last two days, and they kept a sharp look out for natives, for Smedley had no wish to dance attendance on some petty chief, until he could secure permission to advance. Moreover, he had no presents, and he knew sufficient of the customs of the natives to understand that without presents he would be sent back.

They soon reached the Sabi river, and made search for a drift, Gert going up stream, and his master down, agreeing to meet beneath a baobab, or wonderboem, as the old hunter called it.

Gert was the first to return, for one thing because a native has not the persistence of a white man; and for another, because the banks were high and wooded above, affording little hope of a crossing thereabouts. He reached the tree, and for some moments marvelled at its vast spread and many stems. The ground beneath, in and out among the gnarled trunks and roots, was quite bare, being a favourite resting-place evidently for game. He suspended his rifle to one of the boughs, then stretched himself between two stems, and went soundly to sleep.

Smedley, meanwhile, continued his way down the river until he reached a bend where the banks fell away, and were heavily indented with spoor of all kinds of game. From the eddies and ripples on the wide stream, he judged there was a shallow, and stripped in order to bathe, and, at the same time, test its depth.

Placing his clothes and rifle near a heap of rushes, he waded in, and found, as he anticipated, there was no great depth. The water was cool and refreshing, so that he remained in longer than he would have done, floating quietly on his back, but keeping a sharp look out for the black spot which would indicate the head of an advancing crocodile. Sure enough, when he was a good way from the bank, he saw one of these fierce brutes coming from the opposite shore. Using the side-stroke, and with his face inclined towards the saurian, he swam away rapidly, keeping cool enough, although he saw from the increasing size of the crocodile's head that it was gaining on him. He knew, however, that the water shoaled up for a space of twenty yards from the bank, and judged that he could run that distance quicker than the crocodile could scramble.

When his arm, grating against the gravel, warned him that he could stand, he could plainly see the small vicious eyes of the brute, and marked the great length of its broad jaws. He stood up, and made a rush for the shore, still looking back, and was within a spring of the bank, when he turned his face to see where his rifle was. Then he stood aghast.

Standing on the bank facing him was a rhinoceros, an *upetyane*, as he noted from the description given him by Gert, the small black species, dreaded most of all by the African game, on account of its vindictive temper. The creature snorted as Smedley stood still, then advanced until it reached the heap of clothing, the smell of which aroused its anger.

Emitting a series of shrill squeals, it tossed the rifle aside far into the reeds with one jerk from its horn, then began

treading the clothing into the ground, its little tail erect and its wicked eyes fixed upon the white figure standing motionless in the water.

A splashing behind attracted Smedley's attention, and he turned to see the crocodile with jaws wide open within a few feet. He sprang up the bank, and made a dash for a tree, the *upetyane* thundering after him, and squealing like a railway whistle. He had barely time to spring round the tree, when the big brute swept by; and while he was hesitating whether to risk the thorns, back it doubled, and he made a bolt for the reeds, hoping to hide. Into the cluster he went head first, and barely contrived to crawl on one side, when *upetyane* went straight through, and out at the other side.

Smedley secured his rifle, and creeping quietly to the edge, found the rhinoceros standing within a few yards listening intently. He aimed at its shoulder, and sprang away to one side, a precaution he had learnt from Gert; and it was well he did, for with another squeal, the animal charged at the smoke. Smedley could not find his bandolier, and had only one charge left, as he carried a double-barrelled express.

He waited, hoping the brute would make off; but presently he heard it trotting round the reeds, and determined to have another shot. Crawling on his hands and knees, he reached the outer rim, and was peering through the reeds, when he saw the brute furiously trampling his clothes still deeper into the soft ground.

He gave a low whistle; the *upetyane* turned its cunning little eyes in his direction, and he aimed steadily at the small mark. The rhinoceros fell to the report, but struggled to its feet, and rushed blindly into the river,

stumbling over the crocodile, which had paused on the edge, completely puzzled.

The reptile, confused and alarmed by this sudden assault, snapped at the rhinoceros, then made off for the deep as fast as it could; and after it, with great splashing, went the *upetyane*, furious beyond measure. It plunged, on until only its pig-like head showed above the water, which was stained red; then, its temper cooling, it made for the opposite shore, and disappeared.

Smedley, who laughed silently at the singular spectacle in the water, found his cartridges, dug up his buried clothes, and made the best of them. Then, having lost a full hour in this exciting adventure, he went quickly back; but it was dusk when he returned, and if it had not been for the glare of the fire under the baobab, he would have passed the rendezvous.

Glad, indeed, he was to see the fire; and with the hope of a good meal, he briskly advanced, until he was within a few yards of the outer fringe of the tree, when he was astonished to hear voices.

He stood still, listening, and distinctly heard words in Dutch.

Crawling up, inch by inch, with the greatest caution, until he had reached the nearest stem, he drew himself up, being screened from the fire by the huge bole of the parent trunk, and crept along the branch until he reached a fork in the very heart of the tree.

Below him he saw there were several men—white men, too. He gave a sigh of relief, and was about to hail them, when he recognized the face of the Boer he had struck at the Limpopo.

CHAPTER XIX.

A FATAL STRUGGLE.

THIS discovery filled him with dismay. Well he knew from report the lawless character of the trek Boers, who lived on the northern border of the Transvaal, away from the few towns and small villages of the Republic.

They were men impatient of control, to whom even the lax rule of President Kruger was irksome; and they had trekked north to be out of reach of the Field Cornet and the tax collector. They loved solitude, and the sight of a neighbour's chimney smoke was hateful to them. They were a law to themselves, and backed their wishes with the rifle they knew so well how to use. They had the black man's intense love for cattle, the natives inborn laziness, and the white man's strength of purpose. Saturnine, silent, and cruel, with something of the treacherous habits learnt in warfare with natives, they were good haters and relentless enemies, especially bitter towards Englishmen.

Smedley knew that if he fell into their hands they would shoot him as remorselessly as one of them shot down an Englishman named Honey, when the latter approached the Boer's farmhouse for a drink of water.

Where he sat between the branches there was space enough on the gigantic trunk for five men to sit in comfort. He had no difficulty in hiding himself, though he stretched out at full length.

What troubled him most was that there was no sign of Gert, though it was possible the old hunter had been

warned, and was in hiding. He could dimly outline several dark forms between the fire and the main trunk, and at intervals one of the men about the fire would roll himself in a kaross, and join these.

At last three remained about the fire "brying" bones on the coals, the savoury smell from which sadly tantalized the hungry man in the tree alone. They sat there talking slowly and calmly, though not far off a brace of lions were roaring intermittently, and near at hand hyænas were emitting their fiendish laughter.

It seemed near midnight when one of the three rose up, stretched his mighty arms, took a final pull at the water "fikey," and stretched himself on the bare ground. The two others piled wood on the fire, then filled their pipes, and puffed in silence, while they watched the browning of the last *bonne bouche*—a huge buffalo steak, spread out on a flat stone.

Smedley marked this for his own, and found his lips quivering like those of a hungry dog, as he watched the meat spluttering over the coals. He closed his eyes repeatedly in an attempt to sleep, but in vain; they would fix themselves on the feast.

Providence favoured him. While he looked and longed, a lion just as hungry as he, came up, attracted by the smell of newly-killed meat.

There was a sudden silence among the hyænas, succeeded by a low moaning, repeated three times. The watchers by the fire reached out their hands, and seized their rifles. One of them spoke a few words in a low tone, and Smedley heard the clicking of the cocks. He wondered what it meant, but judged from the alert attitude of the men that

they expected danger. He noticed, too, that they were affected differently ; for while one puffed steadily at his pipe, the other smoked furiously, so that the burning tobacco glowed like fire in his pipe.

The moan was repeated—a low ominous sound ; and then, with a terrific roar that shook the ground, a lion sprang forward, alighting within a few feet of the fire. As its huge body struck the ground, two flames of fire shot forth, followed by a simultaneous report, and the lion rolled over and over, biting and striking with its paws. The fire was scattered in every direction, and the steak was tossed away. Even in that exciting moment, Smedley's attention was fixed on the meat ; and when he saw it fall, he swung himself down, picked it up, and was again up in the tree before any one in the tremendous confusion had noticed him. He never enjoyed a meal so much as he did that ash-covered steak, morsels of which he took between his teeth, and severed with his knife Kaffir-fashion.

He admired the nerve of the Boers. Although awaked from sleep in a way that would have shaken many bolder men, they soon stretched themselves out again after a brief inspection of the dead lion. Smedley, too, after his meal, was soon soundly slumbering.

He awoke sore and stiff, and almost betrayed his presence, by suddenly sitting up ere he had come to a sense of his perilous position.

Already, though the sun had not risen, the men below were astir. Some of them were passing oil-rags through the barrels of their rifles ; others were rubbing the sleep out of their eyes as they sat on the gnarled roots ; and a black servant was spreading thick venison steaks upon

coals raked from the fire. Two men were skinning the lion, and two others, those who had kept watch, were soundly sleeping.

Just below him he noticed the feet of two others; their heads were hidden by an excrescence in the tree, and he put the men down as native servants.

The Boers had their breakfast, eating heartily, with smacking of lips, and washing their food down with draughts of black coffee. They then smoked and talked heavily, while their servants fed; and after that one of them made a proposition, to which two of the youngest assented, with a loud shout of approval.

They called to their servants, and the latter advanced to the two men whose faces were hidden from Smedley.

These men stood up. Their arms were tied at the wrists. One of them was a Zulu, tall and fierce-looking, with a bitter taunt to the men who dragged him to his feet. The other was Gert, and he swore fluently and loudly in Dutch.

Smedley almost cried out as he saw the old man, and involuntarily clutched his gun. How had such an experienced hunter fallen into the clutches of the Boers? and who, he thought, was the Zulu?

A Boer gave certain instructions, and the two prisoners were led away, Gert begging for a drink of water—just a mouthful—and crying and swearing by turns; the Zulu marching on silent and erect, with apparent indifference.

A hundred paces off there stood a fine *insange* tree, with a palm-like crown and smooth trunk. The prisoners were stationed on one side of the tree, and a rheim was passed from body to body, leaving a space of about twelve

inches between the men. In the centre of the tree, and just over the rheim, one of the servants cut out a piece of the soft bark, leaving a white mark about two inches square.

Smedley wondered at the meaning of this strange preparation. He looked down at the Boers, and read the explanation.

Two of them were standing forward with their rifles, and even as he looked, one of them raised his weapon, aimed a second, and fired.

He had aimed at the white mark between the two men, and his bullet cut into the soft wood two inches above the square.

“Goot,” said one Boer, calmly. “Scheppers must shoot straight.”

Scheppers said nothing, but with deliberate devilry, first aimed at the Zulu, then at Gert, and for several seconds waived his rifle from one to the other of the victims, until Gert, losing his nerve, screamed out :—

“Skit, skit, you duivels !”

Scheppers moved his rifle a trifle higher, and the feather on Gert’s hat fluttered to the ground.

Gert ducked his head.

The spectators, puffing huge clouds of smoke laughed, and asked Scheppers why he had not placed his bullet three inches lower, and so rid them of a dog of a Hottentot ; and they called on the other marksman, Wessels, to try the nerve of the Zulu.

Wessels called attention to the Zulu’s ears, one of which was ornamented with the brass shell of a martini cartridge.

At the report the Zulu quivered, then stood rigid as a

statue of bronze, while over his heaving chest there trickled a stream of blood.

The spectators took their pipes from their mouth at this specimen of skill; and Smedley, wild with anger at the torture, crept back along the branch, and dropped down. Reaching the ground, he crept quickly along to where an ant-hill stood midway between the baobab and the river.

He rested his rifle on the mound, and waited. If one of the prisoners was shot, he would shoot the slayer.

Scheppers was now ready to take his turn; but instead of firing, he stood wrangling with Wessels.

Smedley looked over the top of the mound, and waved his hat. Gert, excited to a pitch of madness, was rolling his fierce little eyes from point to point, and he saw the movement. He recognized his master, and became suddenly alert. He said something to the Zulu, and the latter cast a swift glance in the direction of the ant-hill, then touched the rheim with his disengaged hand.

Gert nodded his head, and then, fixing his eyes earnestly on the mound, placed his hand on the rheim, binding him to the Zulu, and then waved his hand towards the river.

Smedley noted these signs, but could find no meaning in them, and looked towards the Boers on his left.

Scheppers still stood forward with his rifle, but the others had their faces turned in the other direction, from whence a native was hurrying.

This man shouted out his message in the single word—"Olifant" (elephant).

The Boers immediately made preparations for a start, and Scheppers, seeing that his audience was no longer attentive, asked what was to be done with the prisoners.

"Skit 'em," said one of the others, laconically.

Smedley heard, and knew the moment had arrived. Then Gert again laid his hand on the rheim, and this time his master understood.

Resting his rifle on the top of the mound, he too tried his skill at the mark.

Gert fixed his eyes on the rifle, and waited with quivering limbs, while the sweat ran down his face. The Zulu stood unheeding, except for the quivering of his wide nostrils.

A puff of smoke shot out from the mound, there was a sharp crash, and the bullet, true to its mark, cut the rheim in two.

Gert and his fellow-prisoner doubled round the tree, and, twisting like snipes, were out of reach before the Boers had recovered from their surprise.

Smedley, too, after noticing the effect of his splendid shot, ran to the river, and plunged into the reeds before the astonished Dutchmen could get a sight at him with their deadly *roers*. But they followed quickly after, and, noting where the reeds shook, poured in a volley, and Scheppers, dropping from the bank, plunged in upon the trail.

"Make haste," shouted the others to him. "Finish him off, and follow us."

They hurried on to the elephants, while Scheppers entered the rushes, going with wonderful silence for so big a man. He reached the spot where Smedley had been when he was fired upon, but there was no trace of blood, and Scheppers paused, tapping the stock of his gun gently, and glancing keenly around.

He hesitated, then made a step forward; then paused, and frowned, for it was dangerous work. A rustle in the reeds startled him, and he stepped back, thinking it best to retreat, when there was a report, and he felt his rifle jerked out of his hands.

The same instant Smedley stood up, parted the reeds, and looked grimly at Scheppers, while the smoke issued from his rifle. A wild figure he looked, with his gaunt face and fierce eyes, and his clothes rent and blood-stained.

Scheppers blanched. "Don't shoot," he said, in Dutch. "It would be murder, for my gun is broken."

"You would have shot those men this morning," said Smedley, sternly.

"They were blacks."

"They are men, with the feelings and fears of men, and you tortured them."

Scheppers shrugged his heavy shoulders. "A white man is not the same. What will you do with me? You have spoilt my rifle, that is injury enough. Let me go, and my friends will do you no harm."

"Go, then; I will not injure you."

Scheppers looked keenly at the Englishman, and a cunning look grew in his face. "Thank you," he said; "I knew you would act like a brave man. See, I have no gun. Will you draw your cartridge, and lay yours aside until I am out of the reeds? I would not like to be shot in the back."

Smedley drew his cartridge, and laid his weapon aside with a movement of indignation.

"Goot so," said the Dutchman, and took a stride

forward, while his eyes shone with fury. "Your gun for mine," he growled; "and your life, too."

Smedley, taken off his guard, was seized round the waist. In the pride of his great strength, Scheppers lifted his opponent in the air as though he had been a child, and thought to fling him to the ground; but Smedley threw an arm round the other's neck, and saved himself, and they both came to the ground, crushing the reeds flat.

They staggered to their feet, and Scheppers again rushed on his foe. Three times was he struck heavily in the face; but he kept on, hissing through his clenched teeth, and presently got a tight hold of the Englishman by the wrist, and began to twist his arm round.

Smedley grew white to the lips, and almost fainted with pain; but putting all his strength into the effort, he got his shoulder under the Dutchman's chest, and heaved him over, so that his legs described half a circle, and the great man's body fell with a crash.

The fall harmed Scheppers not at all, but Smedley reeled from the exertion he had put forth, and his right arm was numbed to the shoulder.

Scheppers rose slowly up, and showed his teeth in a bloody smile. He felt that he would triumph, and he waited for his breath to return, while he gloated over his victim. He thought too lightly of his foe, and rued it.

The blood flowed again in Smedley's right arm, as he gently rubbed it, while his breath came easier; for though thin, he was as hard as steel, and his nerves were steadying under the imminence of the danger.

As Scheppers came on slowly, the Englishman launched

out a blow swift as lightning, then caught the other by the throat, pressing his weight at the same time, and Scheppers fell heavily, with his opponent upon him.

Smedley dug his knuckles under the coarse black beard, until the Dutchman gasped for air; then he stood up, and retired a few spaces.

Scheppers sat up with his eye rolling wildly; then, with a swiftness that he had not previously shown evidence of, he was on his feet, seized and clubbed one of the rifles.

Smedley jumped in to avoid the full force of the blow, but he was rolled over; and when he looked up, he saw the rifle raised above him. It was all over then; he saw the hate in the eyes glaring at him from the blood-stained face, and noticed the tightening of the thick fingers on the gun-barrel.

He winced, and the Dutchman noticing it, laughed fiercely, and swept the butt of the gun down in pretence, and fainted once or twice with it.

“Verdomde English!” he shouted, in a bull’s voice, “I will crush in your skull like an egg shell.”

His shout was answered by another just as fierce, and as he turned to see what the noise might portend, two men sprang towards him with assegais in their hands.

“Ah, duivels!” he muttered, and swept the first one off his feet with a swoop of the rifle. The other thrust at him, but he caught the spear on his left arm, which it entered to the bone, then struck fiercely with his weapon.

The man, a Zulu in the prime of life, sprang lightly back, and picking up the spear which the first man had dropped, rushed in again. This time the butt of the rifle

fell on the side of his head, cutting it to the bone, while the blood rushed down.

The Zulu staggered, then with a yell plunged his broad shaft right through the Dutchman's neck, and with a fierce cry, Scheppers fell face forward, just as the Zulu, too, sank to the ground.

Smedley stood up, and looked on the three bodies in amaze. This escape from death had been miraculous. A moment ago he was helpless at the mercy of his foe; now that foe was dead or dying, and his assailants in the brief struggle were dead or disabled.

He went to Scheppers, and gently turned him over. His eyelids were quivering, and he moaned. The assegai had broken off, leaving the blade in the throat. He drew it out, hoping to staunch the flow of blood, but when the spearhead was removed, the Dutchman gave a great groan, and was dead.

Then Smedley, with nerves greatly shaken by the sound of that last cry, turned to look at those who had saved his life.

One was sitting up—he who had been first knocked over. It was Gert; and his senses had not quite returned, for he looked dazed. The Zulu lay prone on his chest, with face buried in the reeds, and arms outstretched. Smedley moved him to see if he was also dead; but the fellow fetched a deep breath, and immediately stood up, swaying slightly, and staring at Smedley through blood-shot eyes. His left ear was wounded, and Smedley recognized in him the man who had been tied to the tree.

Gert's wits returned, and, with a glance at the dead man, he picked up his master's rifle.

"Come, baas," he said, huskily ; "let us hasten, for the other Boers will soon be here."

"Eweh Inkose," spoke the Zulu, in deep notes, as he waved his arms to the east, and strode off.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FLIGHT OF LOCUSTS.

THEY crossed the river at the drift, where Smedley had been the sport of the black rhinoceros, and the two black men bathed their wounded heads in the cool waters, gaining much relief therefrom.

Once on the farther shore they pushed on through a park-like country filled with game, and never paused until they had scaled a granite kopje, from whose rounded summit they looked down upon the winding Sabi. They marked the baobab tree in the distance, and they saw a man hurrying away in the direction the Boers had taken.

"He has seen the dead man," said Gert, "and runs to tell the Boers. They will surely search for us, let us run ; my head is yet sore from the blow."

His master objected, and gave orders to Gert to build a fire, while he shot a duiker which stood at the base of the hill.

Gert remained on the summit to watch, saying it was better to go hungry and keep his life ; and very soon he hastened down with the news that the Boers had reached the baobab, while their Kaffirs were running on the spoor to the drift.

Scattering the coals, and stamping out the fire, they

struck on through a series of small kopjes, and entered an undulating country, whose hollows were filled with scrub bush. After two hours' fast walking, Smedley turned aside and took shelter behind a rock on the crest of one of the ridges.

"All right," said Gert, who had recovered from his scare; "if the baas will stay here, let the Boers come. Gert don't care." He stretched himself in the shade, and went to sleep straightway. The Zulu gazed round long and searchingly from under his hand; then he, too, sat with his back to the rock, and took snuff.

Smedley looked at the man musingly, wondering who he was, and how he came to be with Gert; then his heavy eyes closed, and he slept.

When he awoke it was late in the afternoon, and the Zulu had gone. He stirred Gert with his foot, and asked him what he knew of the Zulu, and how he came to be a prisoner.

The old hunter explained that he had gone to sleep under the tree, and that the Boers had found him, and recognized him. They had tried to learn from him where his master was; and as he would not tell, they bound him up, and secured him to the Zulu. As for the latter, he had no knowledge about him, except the one fact that the man did not belong to the Boers' party, and that he had without hesitation followed Gert when he started to help his master, with what result the latter knew. The assegais they had found under the bank, from which circumstance Gert imagined that the Zulu had been in the neighbourhood some time.

"And where do you think he is now?"

"Maybe gone. See—baas help him; he help baas. Don't owe anything more; so go if he like, stay if he like. Halloa—hark there!

There was a rifle report to the east, followed by another.

"That is the Boer *roer*," said Gert, in a whisper. "What will they shoot?"

They waited, listening intently, but heard no further sound until the sun had sunk, when there was a rustling in the bushes, and a figure stood dimly outlined against the sky.

Smedley threw up his rifle, and the sharp click of the trigger broke the silence.

"Don't shoot, baas," said Gert, quietly; "it is the Zulu."

The stranger laughed quietly, and sat down.

Much relieved, Smedley laid down his gun, and bade Gert ask the Zulu where he had been.

"Yah, sieur;" but all the same he did not ask the question, but remarked that it would be a good thing to light a fire and cook meat, for they carried a haunch of venison.

"There is wood near," said the Zulu.

"A fire is a good friend to an enemy," hinted Gert. "There are three of us here, and we are friends," replied the other.

Gert got up and searched for sticks, muttering all the time in strong language about the Zulu manner of talking round a thing.

After the venison had been roasted and eaten, Gert at last asked the Zulu where he had been.

"While you slept I saw the Boers coming, and led

them away, far to the east. Then when it grew dusk, I stole away from them, and they went back to their friends at the river."

"But we heard firing."

"Yes, they fired at me," replied the Zulu, proudly; "and they sent two runners on to Gungunhana to warn him of our escape. There will be fighting over the body of Siluana." He took a copious pinch of snuff, filled his chest with air, and began a booming noise, which gradually broke into a song—or chant, in self-praise.

"I am Siluana, the lion; the terrible one, whose voice is heard in the plains; the man-eater." For some time he chanted in this way, standing up, and raising his hands, until his excitement and exultation passed away, when he stretched himself on the ground and slept.

Siluana (the lion), it appeared, was the younger son of Chibaba, a chief occupying territory in north Gasaland; and having slain a Portuguese officer, whom he found trifling with his sweetheart, he was obliged to fly south, hoping to find protection with the paramount chief, Gungunhana. That chief, not caring to be involved in troubles, gave Siluana a hint that he had best get out of the country. He was making his way up the Sabi River to his uncle at Umsila's old kraal, when he had been taken prisoner by the Boers for declining to act as their servant.

The little party kept together, working gradually to the west, passing through vast layers of water-worn pebbles, where food was scarce, and they suffered great privations. The country stretched away, grey, desolate and lifeless, with a rim of blue on the north-west, where the mountain chains of Mashonaland began.

Silwana, the Zulu, left them in the plain, saying he would enquire of Umsila if any Mazungo had passed lately into the mountains ; and agreeing, if he heard ought, to meet the white Inkose at the junction of the river Umshagazi with the Sabi. He strode away to the right, and for hours his figure was the only moving spot that could be seen by Smedley in the wide horizon.

He could not enter into the feelings of the Scotch settler, Pringle, who had sung the praises of the African desert :—

“ Afar in the desert I love to ride,
With the silent bush-boy alone by my side ;
Away ! away ! in the wilderness vast,
Where the white man’s foot has never pass’d ;
And the quivered Coranna, or Bechuan,
Has seldom crossed with his roving clan.
A reign of drought, where no river glides,
Nor rippling brook with osier’d sides !
Where reedy pool, nor mossy fountain,
Nor shady tree, nor cloud-capt mountain,
Is found to refresh the aching eye ;
But the barren earth, and the burning sky,
And the blank horizon round and round,
Without a living sight or sound.”

So sang Pringle of the pathless karroo, which he glorified with a poet’s fancy. Frank Smedley had no poetic gift to clothe and beautify the desolate plain. That level stretch of grey, dry grass stretched on and on, without a rock, or bush, or tree, to vary its hideous monotony. As he walked on, hour after hour, in the sweltering heat, in an oppressive stillness, broken only by the regular fall of the feet upon the hard ground, the sameness that every tuft of grass bore to another, the resemblance of every mile he entered upon to that he had

covered, depressed him. Two days they walked steadily on, quenching their thirst on the first from the small store of water carried in their flasks, and on the second from burrau bulbs, which Gert dug up with his knife. The dry heat drew painful gatherings on Smedley's cheeks, and his hands were blistered from incautiously grasping the burning barrels of his rifle. In the afternoon of the second day his brain seemed on fire, a mist rose before his eyes; he staggered along helplessly for a few yards, and then stood swaying to and fro. Gert caught him in his arms, placed him gently on the ground, then, crossing the guns, made a rude shelter with his coat.

The old man stood looking down upon his master's face, almost as black from sunburn as his own, and shook his head several times. He took off his flask, and shook it. A silvery swishing told that it was yet a quarter full. He shook it again, holding it to his ears, and a queer look came over his face—something like the rapt and wonder-worn expression that falls upon a child's face when she listens to the sea moaning in a shell.

"That is music," he muttered in Dutch. "The splashing of water when a man is far from a fountain—than it, what can be better? Eh, it is sweet."

He shook the flask again.

"When I hear it, I see the water plashing into the pool, where the grass grows soft in the shadow."

He stood there with the flask to his ear, and his thoughts going back to the green valley where he watched his "young barbarians at play;" when he danced in the moonlight, and drank, and fought, and danced, and laughed, and fought, and drank again; when food was

plenty; when he owned fat cattle, and called no man master.

He had a master now, to whom all his affections went forth; for man must love and reverence something, and better love and reverence another man than nothing. He stooped and shook the flask by his master's ear, and smiled when he saw the muscles about the mouth twitch.

"Dat es right, yah, et es good; he is just weak, and the sun was not kill him yet. But et was close."

He sat down patiently, waiting for his master to recover, keeping his beady eyes upon the still face; and when he saw that his master slept, he still sat like some carved image. When Smedley woke from his sleep late in the night, and called for water, the flask was ready to his lips.

In the cool of the morning they went on, Gert stopping now and then to pass a blade of dew-covered grass between his lips. Then he put a pebble in his mouth that he had kept there for two days, and kept on, uncomplaining, by his silent and determined master.

They passed soon into rougher ground, and then among strange masses of rock piled one on top of the other in fantastic shapes. At regular intervals, also, were mounds of smaller stones gathered evidently by human hands, though for what reason they were so placed, and when, no one can say. As they journeyed on, tired but resolute, the sun was presently obscured by a dense cloud, and on turning to see whence it had suddenly sprung, a strange sight met their gaze. The cloud seemed alive. It did not roll along like a thunder cloud, or like a summer cumulus moving, "altogether when it moves at all," but had an undulating, expanding, and contracting movement.

"Locusts," said Gert briefly, in reply to the wondering look in Smedley's eyes.

As the mass came nearer, smaller clouds upon its rear could be seen swiftly moving along the flank, now opening in extended lines, and now gathering into masses, which appeared to charge into the greater cloud, causing the latter to undulate, or swerve slightly at each charge.

"They are locust birds," said Gert; "they chase the swarm; see, there are others coming behind, following up till the locusts settle for the night."

True, behind the smaller flocks Smedley could now see numbers of larger birds flying slowly. Then he heard a strange hum, growing every moment louder and louder, until it swelled into a murmur, as of the waves breaking on a distant shore, and then filled the desert with a great rolling melodious sound, as the myriad wings beat the pulsating air overhead. For a full hour the swarm moved above them, shutting out the sky as though a curtain had been drawn between; and the solid mass of a uniform brown resolved itself into myriads of individual points, each one moving on its own line, overtaking and being overtaken. Where here and there a small rift occurred in the close ranks, the sunlight gleamed like a quivering silver streak upon transparent wings.

When this vast living canopy was nearly three parts over, its rearmost fringe whirled and swerved in direful confusion; and the whistling sound of swift wings could be heard through the booming roar of the swarm, as the flocks of pursuing birds harassed the flank.

These birds, as large as pigeons, dove-coloured, with swallow-shaped wings and wide beaks, swept along the

swarm, killing and eating incessantly. A shower of gauze-like wings and hard locusts' legs, falling thick enough to colour the ground, testified to the enormous execution done overhead. When the swarm passed away with a roar and a rush, the great black and white locust birds, or *springhaan vogel*, came toiling patiently along, looking forward to the feast they would have when the swarm settled.

These big birds were not the only creatures who looked forward to a hearty supper. Gert presently pointed out to Smedley a patch of white, moving round a distant hill, and told him it was a herd of spring-buck, which had heard the approaching swarm, and was waiting for it to settle. Gert, too, promised himself a feast off fresh locusts that night, and told his master that he would dry thousands on the following day in the sun, and grind the dried bodies into flour.

"It makes goot bread," he observed. "It is wonderlike!" he continued, "wonderlike! The locusts come, eat grass, eat bushes, eat crops, eat anything; and the birds, the spring-buck, sheep, horses, and men, ebbly ting eat de locust."

Smedley rather doubted Gert's veracity, but towards dusk he admitted that the old man was right.

They came upon the swarm in a shallow valley, between two hills, the van resting on the base of one hill, and the vast brown column, half a mile in width, stretching right across to the other. The work of execution was going fiercely on. The large birds, drawn up in line, were feeding along the near fringe, each bird as it stepped along being enveloped in a cloud of locusts, which,

however, merely rose to settle again a few yards farther on. On the farther side, hundreds of spring-buck were literally browsing upon this strange live crop, while small red cats from burrows in the earth, and flocks of knorhaan, paaus, and partridges were busy; and all the time the locusts were feeding too. The sound of their jaws on the dry grass, stumps, roots, and upon their own wounded, made a sibilant noise perfectly audible. Where they settled, they left the ground bare as a rock.

Gert carried out his intention, scooping up hundreds of the locusts into his game bag, and baking them upon a flat stone, heated over a smouldering fire of game "chips."

They slept that night near the swarm; too near, for Gert missed his hat next morning, and searching about, found only the buckle of the strap which had encircled his old felt smasher. No doubt the locusts would have eaten the buckle also, if they had been given time; but the commander-in-chief had signalled to his vast army in some mysterious way to resume the march, and the swarm had gone off just after sunrise, leaving a few thousand stragglers on the bared ground of the encampment. The work of destruction was still in progress. Fierce black ants, from their nests beneath the ground, were attacking stray locusts with reckless fury, simply for the excitement of the chase; for after worrying one, they would pounce upon another. Here and there isolated struggles were in progress; great hairy spiders, their eyes gleaming like diamond points, their sharp jaws buried deep in the victim's throat, trying to pull the locust into the trap-nest, and the latter resisting with all his strength. The heavy squadrons of large, white-winged birds, still slept the

sleep of the satisfied; while the light cavalry, the pretty dove-coloured birds, were just taking up the pursuit, and went off in a cloud, with a splendid rush.

That day and the next they camped by a pool, while Gert dried his share of the spoil, and crushed the bodies into a paste.

"It will come in good," he said, "when we go up the mountain, for many men have died from hunger there."

Smedley was anxious to push on. He had surrendered the two days to Gert with great reluctance, but the rest had done him good. The fever that threatened to lay him low when crossing the plains had left him, and he set forth with renewed vigour and hope.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BATTLE.

Soon after this they entered into a tremendous defile between the mountains they had so long seen, and Smedley judged, from his chart, they were not far distant from Undungusne, one of the great Zulu chief's military kraals. They saw two men posted on lofty points, and at once determined to proceed only by night. Leaving the path along which they had entered the defile, they crept in among a pile of huge rocks, which had been detached from the sides, and there found a safe hiding place, whence they commanded a view of the path for a mile.

Soon after hiding they saw a long line of men approaching in double file, at a quick step, which soon brought them up. Every man carried two assegais, a

shield, and battle-axe, and Smedley estimated their strength at a thousand. On emerging from the defile, they turned sharply to the west, in the direction of the Sabi, which there made an abrupt turn to the north. After the main body came a number of men carrying stretchers, or rude palanquins, in which Smedley, to his astonishment, noticed Europeans—Portuguese, he judged them, from their sallow complexion and high cheek-bones. After them again came a crowd of natives, carrying camping material, pots, pans, mats, &c. In the rear were a company of Mozambique and half-caste soldiers, carrying their rifles anyhow, and making a great chatter. Very slovenly they were, and altogether different in bearing to the Zulu warriors.

This spectacle did not reassure them, especially as Gert was certain he saw, in the crowd of camp followers, one of the Boer servants who had helped to bind him up under the baobab.

At intervals during the morning small bodies of armed men came down the path, and followed the broad trail of the main body, while others, chiefly women and girls from the camp-followers, returned.

They judged, from this fact, that at the head of the ravine there was probably a large settlement, or military kraal.

“We shall have to go back on our trail,” said Smedley, “and consider our position.”

“Here comes yet more men,” said Gert, pointing to the opposite side of the ravine; “how come they get up there?”

Following the direction of the hunter's gaze, Smedley

saw, far above, on the opposite slope, a number of dark figures leaping from rock to rock, down the rugged wall of the ravine, which on that side was not so precipitous. Dangerous enough, however, their descent seemed; and as Smedley watched their leaps and bounds, he noticed that they paused frequently, as if to consider their next step.

"They are hiding away," exclaimed Gert, in excitement. "See, *sieur*, every time some one shows down below they stop."

A party of women, laughing and dancing, came up the path, and Smedley saw that the men on the rock above crouched down or flattened themselves against projections.

When the women had gone far up the defile, the men continued their descent, sometimes dropping from one ledge to another, at others springing from boulder to boulder, and as they came lower, exhibiting signs of impatience. The leader was a tall powerful warrior of great agility, and he kept on waving his hand to those behind, as if to hurry them. He was now almost opposite the hiding place where the two wanderers lay, and he dropped down to a ledge, which left him exposed to any who might chance to come along.

At that very moment two Mozambique soldiers returned, and on seeing the girls at the far end of the defile, they shouted to them. The girls sent back a shout, and turned away round the curve.

The soldiers went on cursing and shouting, with their eyes on the road. The Zulu on the ledge, at the first appearance of the men, tried to get back, but failing, he signed to his men to keep quiet by placing his hand over his mouth, then stood against the rock erect and still.

The soldiers had almost passed the place, when one of the warriors, leaning too far forward in his eagerness to see what was going on, slipped and dropped his assegai, which rattled to the ground with a great clatter.

Seeing detection was inevitable, the leading warrior dropped from his ledge to a rock below, but missed his footing, and rolled into the path at the feet of the soldiers.

They had been alarmed at the noise at first, but seeing a man at their feet, grew bold, and turned him round to examine his face.

"Siluana," they shouted, in alarm, springing back and cocking their rifles.

Smedley heard the cry, and the click of his trigger followed.

"Siluana," shouted a score of voices from the rocks above, and the frightened soldiers looking up, saw a line of men rapidly dropping down, as if from the skies upon them.

One of them ran, the other raised his rifle just as the fallen warrior was in the act of rising. His fate seemed sealed, when a sharp report rang out, and the Mozambique started back alarmed, as the bullet whistled over his head, knocking his straw hat off.

The fallen Zulu, taking quick advantage of his opportunity, sprang to his feet, and hurled himself upon the soldier, bearing him with a tremendous crash to the ground. There was a moment's struggle, and the warrior rose with a blood-stained knife in his hand, while he sent his war-cry booming down the defile.

He was surrounded in a few seconds by the rest of his party, and they all stood looking up at the pile of rocks

from which the shot had been fired which saved the life of Siluana.

While they looked, Smedley stepped out on to a broad rock, and at sight of him, with his rifle, Siluana ran towards him with signs of great joy.

"Inkose," he shouted, placing his hand on the white man's shoulder, and turning to his men, who stood amazed.

"Yebo, Inkose Mazungo" (White Chief), they shouted in response, raising their assegais.

In a few hurried words, Siluana explained to Gert that the small *impi* they had seen quit the defile was in search of him, and also of the white man, Smedley himself. He had, he said, been watching their movements, and had intended stealing on the kraal at the head of the defile, in the absence of the warriors, in order to secure guns.

"It was now too late," he said, "as the Mozambique would give warning, and if they did not wish to be caught like jackals in a hole, they would have to move out quickly into the open."

Suiting the action to the word, Siluana led the way, and Smedley followed, resolving at the first opportunity to part company with the reckless chief.

The men with Siluana were old warriors of his former regiment, the *Ihlama doda*" (man eaters). He had stolen into the military kraal, and whispered that he was on the war-path. Immediately they had left all, taken up their red shields and assegais, and followed after him one by one, stealing out in the darkness to escape observation.

For some time they followed on the trail of the *impi*; then leaving the track which skirted the Sabi on the east,

they crossed the river, and were at once hidden amongst a vast number of granite kopjes of most fantastic shapes. Some were rounded into imposing domes, others were like spires, and many were formed of detached rocks, placed one on the other in sizes gradually decreasing, until each kopje narrowed to a peak.

About the hills near the river were signs of old surface gold workings, narrow cuttings, and piles of stone, marking where ages before the Phœnicians, or their negro slaves, had toiled for gold dust, washed down from the higher plateau by torrential floods.

There were no signs now of human activity. The trenches, cut perhaps two thousand years ago, had never been deepened. No implement had been used in them since the last blow was struck far back in the past. The summer rains, which had washed down the grains of gold after which the first miners hungered, had filled the cuttings with rubbish, leaving a shallow trough to mark the outline; but the piles of stone still remained as they had been left. The intelligence of the first miners had departed with them, when they were recalled to their distant homes on the blue Mediterranean, if they were recalled. Perhaps the wild natives had risen against them, and destroyed them utterly to the last man, so that none had returned to tell the tale.

Whatever arts the natives learnt from the daring explorers of old, they have not built up any structure of civilization upon them. The peace-loving Mashonas, it is true, possess certain gifts, which place them above the fighting savage. They smelt the ironstone, forge weapons, and laboriously manufacture clothing by

hammering the bark of trees. Like the birds of the air, which learnt to build a nest in a certain way, and have never improved on the original design, the Mashona has not been capable of invention.

These thoughts entered Smedley's mind as he kept side by side with Siluana, until a vivid flash of lightning roused him from his musings. He noticed then that a storm was brewing.

Masses of clouds, black as night, shut out the whole of the north, and stretched into the mid-vault of the sky. A sudden stillness fell upon the land, as though nature held its breath in expectation. A lioness with her cubs crossed the path, and slunk with a frightened look into a patch of bush, and a troop of wilde beest (gnu) stood still as rocks, with their shaggy heads turned in one direction.

The piled-up masses rolled on majestically, moving all together, dark, threatening, and slow, with vast recesses and huge caverns showing in the bulk, while between the overwhelming cloud and the hushed earth sped at great speed shreds and waifs of white vapour like whiffs of smoke from heaven's artillery

The air grew hot and oppressive, and through it there quivered the mutterings of the thunder afar off. Overhead the black clouds filled the sky, and reached away almost to the southern horizon, which was rimmed with a line blood red.

A gust of hot wind swept down among the hills in diverse currents, which met here and there in resulting whirlwinds. These sucked up the dust, and swept round and round with giddy speed, lofty columns showing yellow against the dark sky. Another pause and stillness,

and then the heavens were rent and torn by flashes of livid fire, and a noise terrific beyond imagination filled the air. The thunder cracked and roared, and the earth gave back the sound, in echoes and reverberations tossed from the iron-bound rocks and hills in deafening clamour.

The play of the lightning among the granite rocks was grand, but fearful. Balls of blue fire flashed here and there, and forked streams of electricity darted like a serpent's tongue along the ground, and one enormous rock was split with a noise that almost rivalled a thunder-clap.

A leopard in its fright started from the rocks, and crouched at Smedley's feet, whimpering, but he himself was too astounded by the awful din and the flashing of the lightning to take much heed of this. The Zulus, covering their eyes, crouched on the ground silent as death, with Gert among them.

Then down came the rain in one sheet of water, and in an instant the hard ground was flooded. Streams red with soil swept round the rocks, and, gathering in volume, plunged into the river, whose roar could be distinctly heard in the intervals of the thunder.

In a few minutes the rain swept by, and following it, came the day again, bright, brilliant, and rejoicing with air cool, and sweet with the smell of the earth. The wild beast chained by fear sprang away, scenting fresh danger in the presence of man, and man himself grew bold again.

"It is good," said Siluana ; " the rain will give us time. The *impi* cannot cross the river to-night, and to-morrow I will be ready for them.

He strode on, his satin skin growing quickly dry, while

Smedley was hampered by the weight of his damp clothes. Gert set him an example by stripping, and tramping on in his shirt only, while he carried his clothes suspended from the end of an assegai. Frank, caring more for his health than for ought beside, followed suit, and the Zulus showed their white teeth in approval, and talked among themselves until evening, about the whiteness of Mazungo's legs.

They did not pause until midnight, and then they slept without food for a few short hours. Long before sunrise they were afoot again, and it was not until the cold of the early morning had merged by gradual gradations into the heat of the day, that they finally halted on a square hill fronting a valley.

Siluana approached Smedley, who, glad of the rest, had thrown himself on the grass, and with his head on his hands, was looking through half-closed eyes over the land to a column of smoke on the west.

"The *impi* has not crossed the river," said the chief, speaking through Gert; "they are so sure of catching us that they advance openly. Well, they will feel the lion's claws."

"You do not mean to fight them," said Smedley, looking up into the gleaming eyes of the young warrior.

"We will fight here, on this very spot;" and he struck his assegai into the ground, with a fierce gesture.

"What, with only a score of men?" said Smedley, sitting up in amazement.

The chief placed his fingers to his lips, and whistled shrilly.

The long grass on the hillside stirred as though the wind had swept over it, and an army arose.

Frank leapt to his feet, and looked and rubbed his eyes. Where the grass had waved over the lonely hill but a minute before, there stood 500 warriors, with their shields and assegais.

Siluana waved his hand, and the black line advanced at a rush, whistling shrilly, and rattling their assegais on their shields. They halted within a few yards, and stood silent, their wings enclosing the little party, and their rolling eyes showing above the line of shields. Then together, in a great roar, they shouted, "Bayate," and lifted their assegais three times.

"These are my soldiers," said Siluana, proudly, "warriors of the Matabeli."

"What do they here, so far from their country?" asked Smedley.

"The tiger roams far for his prey. These are the limb of a great army, which has been eating up the people beyond, and they strayed south. They are of my mother's clan, and I knew them by their shields. They will fight for me."

Smedley looked with interest at the fierce and blood-thirsty warriors, the scourge of the peaceful Mashona. Like all Zulus, the aristocrats of the native tribes, they were lithe and well formed, with the stamp of war upon their faces. Their intense pride of birth and contempt for all others were visible in the poise of their heads and their dignified bearing.

Though he felt surprised and uneasy, Smedley was unmoved. "Let us eat," he said, turning to the chief.

"When we have washed our assegais, and not till then," replied the chief, grimly. He waved his hand, and the

men sunk from sight, as completely as though they had never been.

“What part do you expect me to take in the fight?” asked Smedley

The chief looked at him a moment, then gave an indirect answer. “If they triumph, they will kill you, whether you aid me or not—whether you fly or stay.”

“Have you heard anything of the white man I told you of?”

“I have news; and after the fight I will tell you, if you help me.”

“I will do what I can.”

The chief called his indunas together, and they eagerly discussed the order of battle.

This was very simple; scouts were to be sent out to decoy the *impi* into the valley, and when the enemy had reached the foot of the hill, Siluana would give the signal, and the Matabeli, suddenly rising, would rush to the attack.

“If the attack fails?” asked Smedley.

“We will all die fighting,” said Siluana.

The scouts went off at a run, and there was nothing to do but wait.

“I do not like your plan,” said Smedley, after a long pause, to the chief, who sat fingering his battle-axe.

“Speak! white chief.”

“Let me have your old men; they are, as I see by those who are “ringed,” about one hundred. Give them to me, and when you attack, I will fall on the rear of the enemy.”

Siluana took a pinch of snuff, then called his indunas,

and spoke to them. They all dissented strongly, saying they had never fought in that way before, and did not mean to begin now.

The young chief listened gravely, and when all were done, he whistled loudly, as he had done before, with the same result.

The five hundred men rushed down, and halted. Siluana went down the line, and called out every "ringed" warrior, men whose hair was twisted into rings, and made hard with wax, in sign of marriage.

He drew these men aside, and signalled to the others to take again to the grass; then he addressed a long speech to the ringed men.

"They are yours," he said, turning to Smedley; "do with them as you like. The Mazungo Inkose," he added, raising his voice for the benefit of the doubting indunas, "is wiser than we are."

Smedley, through Gert, addressed the small company of warriors. "I will not ask you to do what I will not do myself, but you must wait for my orders."

Though Gert spoke, they deigned not to glance at him, but fixed their gleaming eyes on Smedley.

When he had finished, they shouted "Yebo" (Yes); and without more ado, he led them away, down the right ridge of the valley, until he had reached the shelter of a large rock, behind which they lay down.

Smedley looked to his rifle, an express by Westley Richards, and began to feel in him the stir of battle and the fierce excitement which was plainly visible in his strange companions.

The valley seemed deserted; not a man was visible of

Siluana's force, but the vulture, soaring beyond human sight, marked the recumbent forms, and swooped earthwards in wide circles.

An exclamation from one of the men drew Smedley's attention to the mouth of the valley. The scouts were returning, walking together, and looking back as they advanced. They passed below Smedley's ambush without noticing him, advanced leisurely right up the hill to the crest, where they stood with their faces to the valley.

Then the Gaza men appeared, advancing at a trot in three columns, distant about fifty yards from each other. They went in splendid order, four deep, with the captains or indunas in single file, a space from the column. In their right hand they held the short-hafted assegai, which, like the short sword of the Romans, was the proof and symbol of a determined and victorious foe. Their left hand grasped the buckle of the shield, together with a battle-axe. They went by at a run, the tramp of their naked feet setting up a hollow sound.

At the foot of the hill they paused, for the scouts still calmly stood at the crest, which they would never have done had there not been some support at hand.

The leader of the *impi* gave a signal, and the columns formed front, the wings extending up the hills, and inclining inwards, in the famous half-moon formation characteristic of the Zulus.

Behind them came the Portuguese contingent, and in their rear the camp followers.

There was a pause ; and while the *impi* waited in silence for the order to advance, a figure arose a hundred paces before them.

A deep-voiced shout, sullen and threatening, broke from the army.

“Siluana ! Siluana !”

“Here I stand,” shouted the chief, rearing his tall figure, and shaking his battle-axe ; “ what will you have of me ? ”

“ Your life’s blood,” was the response.

“ Soh ! and why. Because I slew the accursed Mazungo who wronged me. Oh, Zulus—children of conquerors—the spirit of your fathers will cry out this night at your shame in doing the bidding of strangers. Bid the cowardly wolves begone.”

There was a murmur in the ranks, and noting this, a Portuguese officer, levelled his rifle and fired. A puff of dust broke from the ground at Siluana’s feet.

The leader of the army raised his voice. “ Gungunhana has sent you out. If you go back empty-handed, you know what awaits you.”

There was a movement down the long curved line, and the rattle of assegais sounded ominously. The warriors, called to obedience by the name of their all-powerful chief, were prepared to finish the business, however distasteful.

The horns began to close in.

Siluana waved his arm, and out of the grass sprang the 500 warriors.

With a terrific cry, they bounded down the hill, the chief in advance, and struck into the centre of the enemy’s ranks, before the latter had recovered from their first shock of surprise.

There was a clash, a rattling of shields, an awful din of groans and cries, and the Matabeli broke through, their

bodies splashed with blood, and their broad blades running red.

The Portuguese met them with a deadly volley, and the Gaza Zulus, recovering from their surprise, fell upon them on either side.

In a minute the rival bands were locked together in one seething mass, with scarce room enough to use their spears. The Matabeli, crushed in on either side, were almost helpless, and in their mad rage they struggled among themselves for space to strike.

Then the Portuguese and their Mozambique rascals fired into the struggling mass, killing friends and foes, themselves secure.

Above the din there came the sound of a mighty voice raised in command. It was Siluana. "Drop shields," he said, "and use your battle-axes."

They did so, and got more room, so that they were able to strike.

Then Smedley led his men out, and none too soon, for with blood-shot eyes, and straining limbs, they were on the eve of springing forward with a shout that would have warned the enemy.

He placed his hand over his mouth to signify silence, and crept on right up to the Portuguese. Then he fired, and at the report the veteran warriors swept through the Mozambiques, spearing many as they rushed on, and hurled themselves in two bands on the flank of the *impi*.

The Matabeli heard the shout, felt the foe yield, and fought afresh with the fury of tigers.

The splendid rush of the veterans left Smedley and his faithful Gert far in the rear, so that the Portuguese,

reforming their broken ranks, shut him off from the Zulus. Their number had been greatly reduced by the flight of the miserable Mozambiques, and there were only six to oppose the Englishman.

Seeing only two, these rushed forward with their drawn swords. One of them fell, shot through the heart, but the others pressed on with a shout, and a hand-to-hand struggle raged independent of the great battle. The Europeans, unlike the savage warriors, fought in terrible silence, with teeth shut. Smedley clubbed his heavy rifle, and met the onset with sweeping blows. Gert, too, plied his short battle-axe, and the Portuguese were held back for an instant.

Again they sprang forward. One of them staggered back, but another delivered a terrific blow at the Englishman. The blade, luckily, was turned by glancing on the rifle-barrel, but the blow brought Smedley to his knees. His assailant drew his sword back to complete his work, and Smedley saw the flash of his teeth, and the glitter of the black eyes, and raised his weapon. The sword was shivered on the bright barrels, and with a curse the officer sprang away.

Smedley regained his feet, and this time became the assailant; but with a cry of alarm, the man fled down the valley.

"Paas op, sieur," shouted a warning voice; "allemagtig!"

Smedley instinctively sprang back, and avoided the thrust of an assegai. The fight had rolled down upon him. A swift glance showed him the writhing forms of demons, an awful sight of bleeding wounds, and furious rolling eyes.

Then he parried another swift stroke of the assegai, and struck out desperately in return, and then joined blindly in the mad struggle. Afterwards he recalled dimly that his rifle had slipped from his grasp, and that some one had thrust a spear and battle-axe into his hands. He knew, too, that he had thrust, and struck, and slipped, and risen again, and struggled hand-to-hand, body to body, in a wild, awful *mêlée*; but of details he knew nothing.

When he at last looked about him, with some thought and power of observation, the two armies were facing each other in silence, incapable from sheer exhaustion, but fighting still with their eyes.

Almost all were lying full stretched on the ground, their chests heaving, and their arms, still grasping their weapons, spread out. Smedley looked with aching eyes over the men; not one had escaped. They all showed gaping wounds about the breast, arms, and head. Their right hands ran blood; and while he looked, one of them flicked his fingers to dry them.

Up the hill, and in between the ranks, were dark forms, still in death, and dark stains were on the grass.

He raised his hand to brush the perspiration from his forehead. His arm was stiff and painful. The hand was red with blood. He looked down, and saw his clothing rent and slashed, with the blood trickling from a gash in his side.

The excitement of battle had passed away, and he looked at his red hand with a dull sickening pain at his heart. What right had he to kill? He looked around again, and some of the men were moving; one or two were shout-

ing insults. In a few moments they would be springing again at each other's throats.

Two figures stood out in advance of the others, leaning on their assegais. He looked long at the one nearest him, before he recognized Siluana.

The young chief was a fearful spectacle. His plumes had been cut away, his cheek was laid open with a wound that stretched up to his head, his left arm hung limp at his side, and his brawny chest was covered with gashes.

Smedley approached him, and pointed to the dead men. He knew two words of Zulu, and raising his voice, he shouted them aloud :

“ You are brothers ! ”

Then while the men looked at him, he dropped his weapons, and walked among the dead to the grim figure on the other side. The warrior raised his spear, and swung his arm to and fro as if he would strike.

For Smedley it was a trying moment. If the blow was delivered, it would be the signal for the resumption of the fight, and he was determined that the chief should not strike.

“ You are brothers,” he called out again, “ and the Portuguese have fled.” The latter words were, of course, not understood, but he pointed down the valley, and the Zulus saw the Portuguese with their soldiers at the far end.

They murmured among themselves, and Smedley, going back unharmed to Siluana, took the weapons from the chief's hand, and laid them on the ground.

But the Matabeli cried, “ We have lost brothers ; let us fight on.”

And the Gaza Zulus, too, broke in, "Of what use will our lives be to us if we return empty-handed to the chief, since he will slay us?"

Smedley saw the signs, and looked anxiously for Gert. Something had to be done to prevent these brave but fierce men from fighting again, and unexpectedly the work of peace was accomplished.

The leader of the enemy suddenly fell forward dead upon his face. He had bled to death where he stood, and no word had escaped from his lips; while Siluana stood opposite him, he had stood, though suffering nature cried aloud for rest.

Siluana raised his hand in time to still the cry of triumph from his men.

"Lo," he said, "a great chief has fallen—the black ox of Shalala. Warriors! the white chief has said we are brothers. We have fought, we have slain, and neither has conquered. Why should you go back to Gazaland? Your leader is dead; let me take his place. Join with me, and we will find a home in the Mashona country, where there are many wives and cattle to be won. Join with me, cubs of the black lion."

Siluana strode across the intervening place, and raised up the dead chief, placing him against a rock, with his assegai and shield by his side.

The warriors looked undecided and lowering.

"Come," said Siluana, "let us make slaves of the women who followed the Portuguese. They have much wealth with them, and the Portuguese have rifles."

He set off down the valley. A Gaza warrior followed him, a score of Matabeli joined in the chase; and

then, with a shout and a laugh, the two lines mingled in pursuit.

An hour after they returned, bringing a band of girls and much spoil. They thought now only of eating.

CHAPTER XXII.

A MYSTERIOUS SIGHT.

Two weeks after the battle four men stood on a lofty mountain, and looked over a forest which covered a large depressed track between the mount and a range to the north.

Smedley had arrived at last at the site indicated in his MSS. Gert was with him, and the others were Siluana and a white-headed Zulu.

They were looking with gloomy eyes at the forest, and the old man several times pronounced the word "Umpagati"—meaning bad and evil in the extreme.

"Why does the old man dread the forest?" asked Smedley; for he with the white head had been talking long and impressively of the folly of entering the haunt of death.

Siluana bowed his head.

"I too," he said, "am afraid of the dark woods."

Smedley remained silent, knowing they would speak if he gave them time.

"The white man knows Siluana is no jackal," said the chief, proudly.

"The chief is a lion robbed of his mate. He dreads nothing," returned Smedley, adopting the native idiom.

"I fear the unseen," said the chief, with a lowering look at the dark woods.

"Listen! oh white chief, son of the seas," suddenly spoke the old man. "Within that wood is a great mystery. We heard it from our fathers. They listened to the story when they crossed the great river. It was told to them by the people they conquered, the people of this land, a peaceful folk. They in their turn had heard the story from their mothers, when seated about the fire, and their mothers still had been told the dread story. How, that when the earth was young, strange people from the seas had entered that wood, taking with them many hundred slaves, and of elephants' trunks great numbers. There they lived for some time. They dug in the earth, and burnt the ironstone. And one day they sailed again hurriedly, taking little with them, but the slaves who had been with them never returned from out those woods. Some entered to seek the cause thereof, but they also were swallowed up. Then the people were afraid, and they moved away a day's journey. I know they did well. When I was a youth there was in my clan a great fighter, one Impanda, great in stature. He heard the story, and he laughed at those who told it as old women. He swore he would enter the dread wood, he took up his famous battle-axe, and called for comrades. But only two would follow him, two as brave and as mighty in war almost as he. A crowd followed him, even to this spot, and I was with them. We marked them enter, and in the morning we saw the smoke from their fire. That was the last sign. Out of the woods they never returned. I have said. The place is bewitched. It is the haunt of spirits, the home

of the dead, who yet live in dark forms. Oh! white chief, listen to me and return."

The old man shook his thin finger, and his dull eyes lighted up.

Gert hid his face and groaned, and even Smedley, at the prophetic look of the old man, felt uneasy.

"Hark to the old man," said Siluana, earnestly, "he is wise. If the Mazungo whom my brother looks for entered there, be sure he is dead. Come with me, and be a chief with us."

Smedley smiled sadly. "Chief," he said, "I thank you; but let me ask you a question. If you travelled across the sea, and over the land, while the moon has five times been seen in the fall, meeting many dangers, in order to do a certain task, would you turn back at the last moment?"

"Enough!" said Siluana; "I see you are like the rock, and I, too, will go. Let it not be said that Siluana deserted his friend because he feared to meet death."

He spoke quietly, without pride; and Smedley almost loved the man for his noble sacrifice in face of a danger which had for his savage mind the most awful terrors, vague, but nevertheless real.

"No, chief," he said, laying his hand on the other's shoulder; "you have your men to lead and protect. Gert and I will go alone."

Calling the old hunter, who, faithful to the last, but heavy at heart, followed slowly, he went down the mountain. He turned once to look back, and saw the chief standing despondent.

Soon they reached the belt of trees and thick under-

wood. From the blaze of noon they stepped into the gloom of the forest.

There were no open spaces to give cheerfulness, no grassy glades or long vistas, but before them, and around them, was a barrier of stems, and trailing vines, and brush-wood. The ground was soft with fallen leaves and rotting twigs, while moss-covered rocks cropped up out of the mould, and gloomy caverns yawned out of tree-clad krantzies.

Their plan was to strike on from south to north, until they came upon some trace of man ; and failing, to cut their former line from east to west. This plan seemed easy enough to Smedley, but Gert doubted his ability to follow his nose. He was not a bee, he said, that could fly straight to its nest, nor a wolf that could smell its way ; but if the baas would lead, he would follow.

Smedley resolutely plunged on into the silent depths, finding a net-work of game tracks on the outskirts, which facilitated his progress. Presently, however, he got beyond the game belt ; for even the timid deer and the greater beasts have no love for the sunless retreats, and they like to be within reach of the open country, where they may catch the warmth of the morning sun.

The ground grew rougher, breaking into valleys with precipitous sides, which necessitated long deviations. Slowly they sunk deeper and deeper into the heart of the woods, where there was no voice of bird or beast, no sound but the rustling of the leaves, or the melancholy scraping of one bough against another ; and the mystery of the silence sunk into their hearts. While yet the day was young on the mountains, the shadows of night gathered in

the woods. They crept over the leaves, stealthily glided down the trees, and gathered more thickly in the dark places.

The bees and ants held possession of the trees; but the bees, though they made their nests in hollow trunks, bathed in the sunlight all the day, and the ants made their round nests of red mud on the topmost boughs, high out of the gloom. Created life must have air and light, else it becomes debased like the shapeless creatures that move sluggishly in cavernous pools.

Yet nature was doing her work beautifully in the dark silence of the woods, as well as in the glad light of day. Growth lives upon decay: out of the dead trees the living trees suck in life through innumerable arteries; and every leaf in the vast extent of green does its work in sweetening the air, and tempering the hot winds that blow from the Equator. But though so still and so quiet those woods were to the dull ear of man, may be the minor creatures could hear the flow of the running sap as it streamed through myriads of fibrous veins. Man can accomplish nothing without waste and noise. The whirl of machinery, the thud of engines, the scream of escaping steam, the rattle of looms, the air vitiated by smoke, rivers befouled by filth—these accompany the labour of man. Nature raises her million of trees, fits them with branches, clothes them with leaves; and no human ear can detect by sight or sound the progress of her labours. But still without man's art, nature is not always attractive or benign.

Our wanderers had other things to think about. Enough for them was the task of groping on, and it was not until they sat down to rest for the night on the sandy bottom of a handy cave, that their thoughts had free

swing ; and they were gloomy, so that their slumbers thereafter were fitful and uneasy.

In the morning they found their way barred by inaccessible precipices, which formed an angle, enclosing at their base maybe half an acre of sand. A shaft of light struck against the side of the rocks, and then fell upon a white object at their feet.

Gert clutched his master's arm, while with the other hand he pointed at this object.

"See ! the dead !" he gasped ; and with his superstition in arms, he buried his face in the sand.

Smedley, suppressing a shudder, walked up to a huddle of bones, with the skull grinning at him. One arm, and the legs, up to the knees, were covered with sand. Near the outstretched hand was the rusted blade of a huge battle-axe.

They left the spot in haste, Gert with many a backward look over his shoulder, and Smedley with his thoughts on the tale told him by the white-headed Zulu. Those were perhaps the bones of the great warrior, Impanda. With their thoughts pre-occupied, they walked on without aim or compass, and in the afternoon they were back at the dead man's unburied bones !

There was a hideous mockery in this unexpected return to a familiar spot within that trackless region, and Smedley stood unnerved, while Gert fled with a cry of terror. The familiarity in the open stretch of sand, in that awful object beyond, was horrible. If the freed spirit of a doomed man were to chance on its dead shell floating on the waves, it might look on the upturned face with an awful sense of proprietorship. So Smedley looked

upon his footprints leading to the dead, with a cold feeling at his heart.

With a frown, he turned his face on the spot, and went to seek for Gert, calling loud, and still louder, but no sound in reply came back, save the dull echo of his own shouting, and the loneliness chilled him.

Then he blamed himself for his fear, and stood still until he grew calm again. He searched keenly for spoor, and presently saw the old man's gun at the foot of a tree, and looking up the tall stem, met his down-turned gaze.

He laughed at the comical expression in Gert's yellow, wizened face, as terror and relief struggled for mastery.

"Come down, you old fool."

Gert clasped a "monkey-tow," or vine tendril, and slipped down.

"What were you doing up there?"

"Looking at the sun, surely," responded Gert, as he wiped beads of perspiration from his brow.

"What for!"

"It was good to see the sun, *sieur*. He tell me the quickest way out from this *verdormde* place. Let us go quick, less the dead man catch us."

"Which way will you go to reach the mountain?"

"The way the sun travels. You can see, *baas*, from the light on the leaves. One side of the tree is dark, the other is light. We follow the light side."

"Well, good-bye, Gert; I will follow the dark side."

"*Allemagtig!* No, *baas*. You can see the old Zulu was right when he say the wood is bewitched."

"We are not bewitched yet, Gert."

"But the dead man, *sieur*?" and Gert looked anxiously around.

"When you fought the other day, there were many dead, but the sight of them did not alarm you."

"Ah! it is different, *sieur*. He has been there so long in the stillness. Let us go, *baas*; the darkness will kill us."

Smedley went on his way, with his face set to the north; and Gert, after hesitating for some time, at last ran after his master, afraid to go on, yet ashamed to turn back.

"We will die together," he muttered, and himself took the lead. They slept that night on a pile of dry ferns; and in the morning, Gert, forgetting his trouble in the relief of finding himself alive, took up his work willingly. He kept along the ridges, but as once before they had been stopped by a precipice, now they found progress cut short by a *krantz*, which descended with a fall of a thousand feet or more into the depths of a valley.

Smedley leant on his gun, and looked over the wild scene. Behind him were bush-covered hills and valleys, at his feet that terrific abyss, with a ring of lofty wall enclosing an oval valley; and beyond the unending stretch of forest, reaching in a level of dark green, to where the hills again rose on the horizon. As his gaze returned from the horizon, whereon it had been fixed in a vain attempt to detect the limit of the forest, it rested on a gleaming circle of water, set in a dazzle of white. It was but a spot in the dark expanse, but it was restful and beautiful to look on by contrast.

Long he looked upon the bright and wondrous sight; then directed Gert's attention to it.

The old man looked listlessly over the forest, then stood fixed in amazement when he saw the flashing wonder.

"It is the eye of the forest," he muttered in awe struck tones. "Wonder-like!"

For many minutes they stood watching the sunlight play and flash upon the spot, set like an opal in a crystal border; and as they looked, the fringe of white appeared to contract and expand like a living thing.

"What is it," whispered Gert, "that moves like that? Look, baas, look! That we should see and be alive!"

Smedley, too, gave an exclamation of wonder, and together they looked rapt and eager upon a marvellous spectacle.

The sun had reached the mountain top, and its broad red beams struck obliquely on the forest.

The ring of white on a sudden grew blood red, and for a minute so remained; then merged again to white.

They looked at one another, questioningly.

"Maybe, it is the blood of those who haf died herein. Those the Zulu spoke of. Surely the place is bewitched."

Smedley did not reply. He looked dreamily at the mysterious spot; as he looked, it seemed to him that above it there formed the white walls of a palace, shadowy, vague, yet with its domes and columns orderly and graceful.

With a sigh, he roused himself, and drew his eyes away; then looked again, and saw nothing but the shield of water and the white rim.

"We must find that place, Gert," he said.

"Ah!" said the old man, gravely, "it is not well to look too closely on such things. But if the baas will—I will."

The night came on fast, blotting out all but the stars.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN A MAZE.

MYSTERIOUS sounds came up out of the deep kloof in the evening, waking Smedley with a start from his sleep on the brink of the precipice. He had been dreaming one of those rare dreams in which the ear detects soft strains of music, and a louder blast, as from some silver-throated trumpet, had awakened him. He sat up, looking out on darkness, which below him was black as ink, when he heard distinctly the wailing note of a violin. He doubted his sense of hearing at first ; but as the notes continued, blending into a familiar tune, sweet but sad, that he had often heard in his childhood, he recognized that some fellow-being was near him in this wilderness of trees. What manner of man could it be who lived in that dark kloof, and roused the sleeping echoes with music ? It was wonderful, but unreal. There was a touch of enchantment about it, an association of the supernatural, that gave Smedley a feeling of awe while he listened. He aroused Gert, and the old man, after listening in intense surprise, summed up his explanation of the sounds in one brief word, "Spooks !"

There must be spooks down below, that was clear to Gert ; and he covered his head up, firmly persuaded that if he listened any further to those strains, he would be bewitched.

Smedley had no desire to shut out the strains ; whether from human or other agency, they were too beautiful to be lost. So he sat on, drinking in the notes that came stealing up in breaks and snatches, the very faintest echo of the far-off melody. When at last they died away in a whisper,

he felt as if he had lost a friend ; and with some hope of receiving an answer, he shouted out a loud good-night. The sound went rolling down the kloof, but he listened long and in vain for any recognition from the mysterious musician.

Next morning, when he looked into the gloomy and silent kloof, he could not believe that there was any living soul within its shadows, and thought that he must have mistaken the sighing and moaning of the wind against the krantz for the music. He looked for the white spot, half expecting to find that it also had been a picture of the imagination, but he soon saw it gleaming wonderfully bright, and again checked its position on the rough map he had scratched on his gun stock. They had not gone a hundred yards on their course, however, when it suddenly disappeared, nor did they see it again. For an hour they kept along the right ridge of the kloof, until they arrived at the end, where it terminated in a high bluff, opposite a similar bluff, guarding the entrance to the kloof at the end of the left ridge. The entrance between was narrow, scarcely fifty feet across ; and the rocky sides sunk sheer down into dark shadows, out of which, like a faint tinkle, rose the sound of rushing water. The kloof, or valley, swelled out, pear-shaped, but everywhere was hemmed in by tremendous precipices, and the only entrance evidently was through the narrow neck. In the centre of the enclosed valley was a wide space, bare of trees, and Smedley examined it closely for some trace of life. There were several dark objects arranged in a circle about the centre of the opening, which might be rocks or huts, but there was no movement about them.

"I should like very much to examine that place," he said.

"Yah, baas, but first to the White Fontein"—so Gert called the gleam of water.

Smedley turned reluctantly from his inspection of the enclosed valley, and joined Gert in searching for a way down the face of the bluff, into the forest plain below. It was a long time before they could find an opening down the rock, and then Gert only hit upon the merest indication of a track. They zigzagged down, stepping from ledge to ledge, and holding to creeping plants, until about midway they came to a long, broad ledge, wide enough to bear a few wild fig trees of large growth and a dense covering of brambles. Here further progress was barred, for the cliff dropped like a wall below. They soon found that they could neither get up nor down, a position which would have had great terrors for them, had they not been hardened by previous reverses. Smedley, it was true, chafed at the prospect before him, and wore a path through the undergrowth in searching up and down for a way out.

Gert, however, took matters stoically. He even observed, with every sign of intense satisfaction, that the figs alone would keep them alive for a month; and on picking up an old feather, he grinned with delight, for, he said, the feather meant pigeons, and pigeons meant fresh meat. He was soon up in a tree, and clambered out on a branch overhanging the cliff, after a choice bunch of figs. While leaning over to gather them, he noticed a thin dark line along the face of the rock, and traced it far down to a ledge which was within reach of the topmost bough of a

yellow-wood. Here was something to investigate. He was soon at the spot where the line joined the cliff, and his wild shout announced to Smedley that something had been discovered. When the latter ran up, he found Gert examining the remains of an old monkey-rope, or vine creeper, which had been looped round the trunk of a fig-tree.

"See, baas!" he cried, excitedly; "it was here some one haf gone down into the woods below. He fasten dis 'monkey-tow' roun' the tree so long time back that all rot away 'cept this."

It was with a strange feeling that Smedley looked upon this sign of man's presence at some long distant period. "But," he said, "of what use is this to us?"

"Ah! *sieur*, surely a way has been made for us. See, when the old vine rot away, it sent out a young shoot, which grow over the rock, and grow and grow until he find some place to fasten on 'mong dose trees below. When et start, ole Gert was a boy, and *sieur* was not yet born. While baas grow up, de vine it grow big, until now—see—et es big enough to climb by."

He pointed to a gnarled and knotted vine tendril, which stretched from the tree over the rock.

"Et es wonder-like, surely, *sieur*," continued Gert, meditatively, repeating his favourite expression.

Fastening their guns across their backs, they went down hand over hand, bracing their feet against the cliff, until they reached the yellow-wood tree, when the descent was easy enough. From the base of the cliff, however, their progress was not so plain. It was one thing to define a course from the summit; but once beneath the

impenetrable roof of leaves, every sign was obliterated. Still they kept on, verifying their course now and again by climbing some tall tree, and taking bearings from the two bluffs.

For two days they tramped on slowly through the thick growth, and at the end of that time they found no indications of the White Fountain. Indeed, they came to the conclusion that they had overshot the site of that mysterious locality, and they approached the cliffs again, making wide sweeps from right to left.

Three more days they spent in this fruitless search, growing weak and hollow-cheeked from want of sufficient food, and dispirited under the frightful stillness of the woods.

"Well, Gert," said Smedley, with a grim smile, as he sat down on a fallen trunk; "are we also going to leave our bones under these trees?"

The old hunter shook his head. "It looks like it, *sieur*. It is some witchcraft we haf not find dot place. It seems to me, *sieur*," he added, lowering his voice, and looking round suspiciously, "dot someting follow us this last day."

"I should like to think so," said Smedley, wearily. "It would be a consolation to know that there was some other living thing in this tomb. Why do you think we are being followed? Have you seen any thing?"

"Not seen any thing, *sieur*, but I hear footsteps. There," he said, with suppressed excitement, "I hear it again!" He bent his ear to the ground, listening intently; then walked noiselessly away, while Smedley strained his ear in vain to catch any sound. In the intense silence he could hear the softest movement, the

rustle of a leaf dragged along by an ant, the bark cracking on the trees, and a dry leaf falling. Then through the trees there came a breath of air, moving the matted hair upon his forehead, and bringing with it a voice that whispered, "Elton, Elton, where are you?" He could have sworn some one was at his elbow, and he sprang to his feet, looking wildly around. His eyes fell only on the fallen log and the trees around. "The whisper had come from no one," he muttered, "and meant nothing; it was merely a fancy of a tired brain." But though he made this explanation to satisfy his reason, it did not still the wild beating of his heart, and fears and hopes alternated. Elton, Elton; he had almost forgotten him. Now, suddenly he believed he lived, and at the same time he had a presentment that he would find him. The re-action from his previous apathetic state to the feeling of exultation, consequent upon his new-born impression, was so marked that Gert, on his return, stopped and wondered.

"Has the master found the way to the Fontein," he asked, "that his eyes are so bright?"

"No, Gert; but we will find it soon, never fear. Did you see or hear anything just now?"

"I see nothing 'cept trees—trees ebberywhere. And all I hear is the sound of our footsteps. Sometimes, baas, it seem that I can see my body here on the ground. Jus' now," he added, sinking his voice; "I came on a dead log, and it was to me like myself."

"Courage, old man, courage! We have come a long way, and are not to be beaten at last by a little wood and a little quiet."

"Where baas goes, I will go," said the old hunter, "but I like not to die an' rot here in the darkness. We haf come far since yester—that whiteness was not beyond this."

"So I think, Gert," said Smedley, looking earnestly at a tree; "and I think I know why."

"Why for?"

"We have been travelling round and round. At least I think so, for I am certain I saw that tree before."

"Baas is right," said Gert, stooping down; "see, here is the spoor in the leaves."

"Then we must be going round; and if I am not wrong in thinking that we were here quite two hours ago, we must have made a wide sweep."

"I don't understand," said Gert, shaking his head; "because the ground hereabouts is flat, and dere is no hill to throw us back."

"We can soon settle it; you go that way, and blaze the trees with your knife. I will go the other way. And if we do not meet within an hour, we will each return by the line of marked trees."

They started in opposite directions; and when Smedley, who had judged that the time had passed, called out, Gert responded.

"Strange," muttered Smedley; "what is it that causes us to move in a ring?" He shouted again, and he heard Gert crashing through the wood, as though he would take a short cut, guided by the sound.

Smedley sat down, puzzling over the strange circumstance; and when he looked round for Gert, he was astonished not to see him.

“Gert!” he cried.

There was no reply.

“Gert!”

“Hi! halloe!” came in a faint sound from his right. The old hunter had passed him unobserved, and he got up and followed in the direction of the sound, thinking he would find Gert at the tree from which they had started.

He reached it safe enough, but there was no Gert there. He called out again and again, and presently again from his right he caught a faint response.

He ran this time, following the route first taken by Gert, as plainly marked by the blazed trees, and soon the responses to his shouts grew louder.

At last he was level with the old hunter, and marvelled that he could not see him.

“Where are you, Gert?”

“Here, baas! come to me quick, ek es bang.” The old man was evidently badly frightened.

Bidding him remain where he was, Smedley burst through the undergrowth, and in a few seconds stood again by his faithful servant.

“It is witchcraft,” said the old man, with a frightened air.

They stood in a small opening between two rows of trees, which swept away on either side.

Smedley gave a sigh of relief.

“It is not witchcraft, Gert. These trees have been planted here by men. They are set in circles within circles, and we have beengoing round and round.”

“Wonder-like! How come they plant them so?”

“Why, indeed? That is to be proved. What, Gert, if these circles enclose the White Fountain—the mysterious shield of water itself.”

“Ah! yes; surely that is so. Come, baas, for my old eyes long to look on it, though it may harm us.”

They plunged straight on between the closely planted trees with the thick undergrowth, and after going on their hands and knees, came on yet another line of trees, evidently planted by design. They were so close together that passage was impossible, unless they climbed up into the branches.

“There must be a way through; let us walk round, and carefully observe every foot.”

They went down a broad avenue always trending in, and presently Smedley wondered how it was that the underbush had not spread over the space and choked it. Going on his knees, he scraped away the fallen leaves with his knife, and soon made bare a space of rock. Setting Gert to work, and scraping himself, they discovered a pavement laid by human hands.

“We are at the place,” said Smedley, springing to his feet, and looking round with a feeling of excitement, not unmingled with awe. “Come!”

They went, as they thought, almost the complete circle, when they noticed a break in the line of trees, and with eager exclamation they rushed forward.

There was the opening, but beyond it they could not go. Their limbs refused to act.

“Merciful God!” gasped Smedley, “what is it?”

“The dead! the dead!” croaked Gert, his eyes almost starting from their sockets.

There was an opening inclining inwards; above it stretched a scaffolding of iron, from which, suspended in chains, were the mouldering bones of seven skeletons. Below, as if to receive their crumbling remains, was a yawning hole stretching across the entrance.

Frank, with a pale face, crept forward, and looked down. For a time he could see nothing, then gradually, with a sickening feeling at his heart, he made out a jumble of heads and bones.

"Horrible!" he cried with a shudder, "horrible! Let us get away from this accursed place."

They went off a little way, and sat down, for they had eaten little in the last three days, and the shock they had sustained weakened them. Gert sat holding his head, and groaning.

"How much longer will our food last?" asked Smedley, presently.

"There is enough for a day, but of what use?"

"We will eat it now—every morsel of it. We must get back our strength for what we have to do, for it is life or death with us now."

They ate their food mechanically, with many pauses in between, and then Smedley got up, and returned to the opening, with its terrors. This time he felt no tremor, and closely examined the iron frame from which the poor bones hung. It was eaten with rust, he noticed; and giving it a push, it snapped, and fell with a crash into the grave already made at its feet. A cloud of grey ash and a sickly odour filled the air; but when it died away, he cut armfuls of branches, and emptied them into the hole, until its contents were hidden.

Then he called Gert, and they climbed up the tree, and dropped down on the further side. They seemed to have cut themselves off from all chance of retreat; and for a moment even Smedley, resolved though he was to push the search to the last, felt an inclination to retreat again.

Then there came to them, soft and low, the cooing notes of a dove, calling for her mate, and the sound gave them peace.

Pushing the bushes aside, they saw a path winding downwards between columns of stone, green with age, and at the end a wonder broke upon their sight.

Serene and beautiful was the Fountain of White, set within a glorious band of arum lilies. Its sloping banks were smooth and soft, and it seemed to the hollow-eyed, wan-cheeked wanderer, that never a spot yet since the world began was so refreshing to the eye of man.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MOUNDS OF IVORY.

LONG did Smedley stand entranced at the beauty of the scene so suddenly disclosed to him. Before him in an oval opening in the forest, about a mile in length, and half a mile in breadth, was the mysterious fountain, the place of whiteness, an undiscovered spot, which for generations had been a tradition among the native tribes.

He noticed with wonder and admiration that the whiteness was caused by thousands of arum lilies, which sprang from a shallow basin of water, filling the whole of the opening, with the exception of a broad grassy margin.

The dazzling ivory-white of the cup-like flowers was heightened by contrast with the glistening stalks and broad green leaves, amid which waded hundreds of the sacred ibis. In the centre was a clear pool, the eye of the spring, its surface ruffled by a pair of swans, whose arched wings matched the lilies, and who sailed majestically to and fro.

After the gloom of the woods, this lovely scene seemed like a picture from fairyland. Even Gert stood with opened mouth, and gasped in sheer astonishment. He had never seen swan or ibis before, and they were to him even more wonderful than the lilies. So they stood there together for many minutes, not daring to move, lest they should break the spell. Presently, as the sun grew low, the ibis gathered together on the grass for the night, and so massed, the delicate pink shading of their wings formed a line of colour right round the lilies. They took no notice of the two motionless forms which had trespassed upon their retreat, but at a given signal, apparently, tucked their heads out of sight. Their tameness struck Smedley as remarkable, for birds totally unaccustomed to the presence of man would, he thought, have shown some curiosity at the appearance of a strange and unknown creature among them. Even when he walked through their ranks to the water's edge, they merely untwisted their long necks, and blinked at him with their bright eyes.

The marvel of the place was not only in the phenomenal tameness of the birds, and in the vast number of lilies. On reaching the water, he found the remains of stone steps, and traced them through the mass of shining leaves to the open sheet in the centre. They had

undoubtedly been laid by men in remote ages. He turned towards the forest and marked several conical-shaped mounds under the trees. Walking towards one of these latter, while yet there was light, he found that it was a dome of stone about eight feet long by six at the highest. One huge slab formed the doorway, across which, fitting into niches on either side, was a bar of heavy stone, immovable without the aid of levers. Upon the smooth surface of the door were hieroglyphics, in which the ibis figured largely, and on the bar were lozenge-shaped signs, with an ibis in the centre. He went on to the next mound, and found it similarly constructed and marked; grass and creeping plants had grown over all the domes, giving them a rounded shape, like graves, and he thought that they were vaults bearing the remains of chieftains of some advanced but forgotten race. The constant repetition of the ibis drew his attention, and he came to the conclusion that the bird had been held as sacred.

This would explain the indifference of the birds at the appearance of a human being in their midst, for he remembered having heard that when birds are accustomed through generations to build in certain trees, their offspring for years after the removal of the trees would circle about the same locality in the breeding season. So it was probable that the ibis, having at some remote period, been petted and fed by their human worshippers, their descendants still retained an instinctive dependence on man—or, at least, unconcern at his presence. He soon noticed that one mound had been tampered with. The bar of stone across the doorway had been shattered, and the fragments used to batter the great slab which

closed the entrance. He examined it carefully, and pushing heavily against the slab, caused it to move.

Summoning Gert, who was looking around with a puzzled expression, they together cut the ground below the slab, and prised it out as it settled down. The interior of the mound was thus exposed.

Smedley peered into the dark cell with a feeling of awe, and, as he expected, saw that it was occupied. Stretched as though on a pile of faggots was the mummified body of a warrior, with brass shield beneath his head. A sheaf of spears had been placed on his left; but though the heads remained, a line of dust marked all that was left of the hafts. On the right of the figure was a two-edged sword, such as the Abyssinian hunters now use for ham-stringing elephants, the edge being all eaten into notches. A greyish cloud, bearing a powerful and sickly odour, curled out, causing Smedley to retreat; and when he returned to look again, the dark skin, which had stretched tight over the aquiline nose, cracked under the exposure, about the mouth.

Gert, with a yell, ran off, crying out that the dead man was angry; and Smedley was about also to leave the place, when his eye was attracted by the peculiar appearance of the stakes beneath the body. These faggots, or stakes, were all of a dull brown colour, and smooth to the look. They were in layers, one layer with points curving up, and the other with broad butts. He drew his knife across one, and it peeled off in a soft covering, leaving a hard white surface exposed.

He looked closer, and found it was ivory. From the top of the pile he drew one out. It was curved like a

tusk, but covered from point to butt in a covering of an india-rubber-like substance. This he removed with his knife, and exposed a magnificent tusk of white ivory, weighing nearly one hundred pounds. There were forty-nine other tusks in the mound, and he judged, from the butts of those on the lower layers, that some of them must have weighed nearly double. He found that the sign of the lozenge and ibis was cut into the base of the tusk he carried.

The Zulu legend, handed down from other tribes, had its foundation in fact; and the presence there of the ivory showed plainly that the original owners must have departed in haste. Before leaving there must have been some fearful tragedy enacted within sound of that lovely water. The slaves who had never returned from out the wood—what had become of them? Slaughtered by their ruthless masters, and huddled into the open grave, left yawning to frighten off any who might thereafter seek to find the secret of the woods.

He walked round the pool, and counted no less than two hundred mounds, all of them securely sealed. If each mound contained as many tusks as the one which he had opened, there were probably one hundred thousand pounds worth of tusks hidden up.

He went back to Gert, guided by a point of fire, picking up the tusk he had exposed on his way. When the old fellow saw the gleam of the ivory, he gave an exclamation of astonishment, while his eyes opened wide when he heard where the tusk had come from.

“My! It is the place of great richness. Wonder-like!” he muttered, parrot-like, in a daze.

“What have you got to eat, there?”

“One of these mooi birds, *sieur*. I nefer see such a place. Make fire, and up along come those birds, just so as they want to be cooked. I catch tree, four, and sure enough this night we make good supper.”

His small eyes fell on the tusk again, and his jaw dropped. The events of that day had moved too quickly. He was incapable of receiving more impressions, and at last he turned to his cooking with the remark—

“Well, well, let us eat, *baas*. We know we is hunger, and we know this is something to eat. Dot is all we do know, and it is no use make the stomach wait while the head tries to find out the meaning of things. That is so.” He handed one bird, nicely browned, to his master, the gravy held in the hollow of the breast, and he possessed himself of another.

Smedley ate hungrily, thinking of little else than the morsel in his hand; for what is the greatest wonder, or the most unbounded wealth, to a starving man, compared with the coarsest food, to satisfy his craving?

When their hunger was satisfied they went down the steps to the water, and drank deeply; then stood up, and looked over the dark waters, with their encircling rim of ghostly whiteness.

Then the mystery of the place came sadly upon them, and they looked around uneasily, reluctant to move, and almost afraid to speak.

Dark shadows flitted along the border of the water emerging from the blackness of the forest, and the birds shifted occasionally with a plaintive noise, as though disturbed. It was lonely in the extreme, and fearsome now

as a dismantled tomb lighted upon in the dark. Men had stood there in the long past, women had gone down into the water to bathe, and children had played on the green banks among the tame birds; but they had gone utterly, and their taking off had been dark and bloody. Aye, it was the memory of that day that cast the shadow over the lovely water. They heard almost the groans of the dying, the shrieks of the despairing mothers pleading for their children, and the fierce cries of the destroying warriors.

"We must go away from here in the morning, Gert," said Smedley, in a whisper.

"There is no marrow in my bones, *sieur*," returned the old man, in a frightened whisper. "Let us keep close by the fire."

They went back to the fire, and took what comfort they could from its friendly glow.

Presently, after a time, they slept, but fitfully, to awaken with a start and a cry of "What is that?" and all the time Gert moaned in his sleep, and once both leapt to their feet appalled by a terrible cry; but though they listened with their hearts almost still, they heard nothing but the souging of the wind and the soft mysterious rustling of the lilies.

Again they slumbered, and Smedley in his sleep saw the daylight shine gloriously on the lake, but it was not as he had seen it. The trees were farther away, and at one end there stood a long low building of white stone, with open courts flagged with marble. Tree ferns stood in the courts, and coloured mats were on the floors, and purple cloths hung between the columns, where stood a warrior

in scale armour shining like gold. And as he looked, a hanging was drawn aside, and a queenly woman all in white, with a crescent on her brow, and raven-black hair in coils down her back to her sandalled shoes, and eyes that flashed beneath long lashes, stepped out and played a while with the heavy bracelets on her rounded arm. Then she moved, and her smooth limbs shone warm and life-like through the gauze-like drapery, and after her came a troop of girls laughing, with their naked feet tripping to a dance, and their arms swaying to the castanets. She in white came towards him swiftly, and looked wonderingly into his face, so close, that he could see the rising of her bosom, and counted the pearls in her hair and the scales in the necklet about her white throat. She smiled at him, her rich red lips parting, and she turned her head to beckon some one. When she looked at him again, her face was changed, and in place of the laughing, bold eyes that flashed with such conscious pride, he met a look so stern and pitiless that he drew away in alarm. Then the whole scene died away, leaving but one solitary figure standing lonely and despondent upon the water's edge.

He knew the form, but he could not recall the name, and while he battled in an agony that is of the nature of dreams with his memory, the face was turned full on him, and he saw that it was Grace Elton.

He rose to his feet, and had taken a step forward, when he awoke to find that he had been struggling with fancies. Nevertheless, the dream recalled him to the object of his journey, which in the excitements and incidents of the last month he had, truth to say, somewhat put in the background.

He thought long and anxiously over his position. It seemed that he had found the treasure written of ; but of what use was that to him, or any one, since there was no one to share in it, no one who had the right to claim it? Then he recalled the sounds of music he had heard ascending from the rock-bound valley, and he thought, "What if the Fossicker is there after all, if there be such a person?"

At any rate, when it was light he would make direct for the valley, and if he found no one, he would return home, and confess that his mission had been a failure.

CHAPTER XXV.

FOUND !

IN the morning Smedley went down the steps to bathe, and when he had swum out into the lake, he saw beneath him many points of gleaming yellow in among the whitest sand. He dived, and grasped a handful of the sand and spread it out on the steps above the water, and saw that the yellow marks were specks of gold.

Then he swam again far into the centre of the water, and thrust his head under the surface so that he could see. The sight was wonderful. The bottom was white and smooth and spangled with gold, and not a weed or lily grew there. Wondering much at this, he took a long breath and felt about in the sand, scraping with his nails, until he thought he felt a hard layer of stone.

This, then, had been a bathing-place, built long years before, and those limpid waters, so cool and refreshing,

had bathed the lustrous limbs of such women as he had seen in his dream. And at thought of that, the fancy seized him that the queenly maiden he had seen lurked somewhere in the pool, and would bewitch him, so that he swam hastily ashore, furrowing the waves with his rushing shoulder. Then he sat on the topmost step, drying his bronzed skin in the sun, and, with his chin on his hand, was lost in a reverie, his eyes fixed on the gleaming water and the lush circle of lilies, among which, in streaks of scarlet, glided the brilliant-hued ibis.

Meanwhile, Gert, rendered brave by the light, had wandered to the north apex of the oval, where in the woods he found some fresh wonder, as his cry testified.

Smedley went up, and there in the trees and brushwood saw the ruined walls of an ancient dwelling—walls of immense thickness, with the herring-bone sign upon them. There had been a terrace round about the dwelling, and its wide doors had been protected by brass grillings, the remains of which were still visible. A god hewn out of stone lay with his head in the ground, and his vast belly and squat limbs uppermost.

While they stood looking in silence, there was a harsh scream overhead, and they turned to see an eagle soar away with an ibis in its talons. A red feather floated down and rested on the placid water, and as it lightly touched the surface, it seemed as though the whole pool was instantly coloured red. By the fallen god, a mamba reared its hideous head, black, and threatening, and all about them the leaves rustled. In an instant all the peace seemed gone from the place, and they went back disquieted to their camp.

Then they gathered up their things, and soon reached the outer circle of trees, whence they started for the kloof among the hills. As they had marked the route, they had no difficulty in retracing their steps; but when they were once more in the gloom of the forest, they wished themselves back at the Fountain.

In the morning they were at the narrow gorge which led from the forest into the enclosed valley. The granite walls rose on either side to an enormous height, shutting out the light to such an extent that the water at the bottom flowed in almost total darkness. The level of the cañon was a few yards above the forest ground, and they had to climb up over the smooth, slimy face of the rock before they were within the walls. When they had advanced a few yards, they could not see the thin strip of sky, for the rocks shelved out above them, and when they had rounded a projecting rock, the light at the forest entrance was shut out. They groped their way by touch, sliding their hands along the cold, smooth stones.

At first they walked along a ledge, but this soon ended, and Smedley, who was leading, suddenly plunged his foot in water.

“Will you follow me?” he asked.

“Yah, baas. Ole Gert is getting tough now—will go anywhere now.”

The water took them up to their knees, and the wading set up tiny waves, which lapped softly about them, and died away in hollow sounds in deep caverns. Then the water grew deeper, coming up to the waist, and Smedley cried out warningly, as he was suddenly obliged to strike out. They knocked against boulders, and got entangled in a

snag, which sorely rasped their arms. Leaving out the horror of darkness, it was hard work keeping afloat, for the water had no buoyancy, and what current there was washed under ledges.

Still, they persevered with their hearts up, and in rounding a bend Smedley joyfully called out that he saw a gleam of light upon the wet side of a rock. With his eyes fixed on the light, he swam on vigorously, when suddenly it seemed to him that the rock moved. Its surface appeared to undulate, and flashes of light sparkled about its base.

As his eyes grew more accustomed to the gloom, he saw that the movement was caused by the unfolding coils of a huge python. Coil after coil slithered over the rock, and glided into the water on the side nearest him; but between the rock and him there was no object on the water, except the furrowed lines of the concentric ripples. While he paused, uncertain whether to advance or retreat, the water before him parted, and the python reared its head. A full minute it confronted him, still as death, then sank from sight, leaving him with eyes fixed in a horror-struck glare on the spot where the baneful eyes had glowed upon him. He drew his knife and waited, panting heavily, for the attack. The serpent, however, passed him by, he felt it touch against his leg, and, looking back, saw a faint streak in the gloom marking its progress. Out of the darkness beyond came the laboured breathing of the old hunter. Fearing to warn the old man of his danger, he nevertheless called out cheeringly, and waited to give assistance if needed.

He heard Gert round the bend, heard his exclamation of pleasure at the light, then heard a startled cry and loud hiss-

ing. As he was about to strike out to the rescue, he saw the tail of the python thrust out of the water near him, and grasping it firmly, pulled lustily. There was a splashing in his rear, mingled with furious hissing and wild oaths and splutterings.

He put all his weight on his arms, and the strain suddenly relaxed. The next moment he saw the python coming at him, its eyes all aflame, and its forked tongue hanging from its red and widely-opened jaws. Blood, too, was slowly trickling from a great wound in its neck, giving it a most awful appearance. Smedley, scarcely knowing what he was about, threw his knife at the brute, and the point scraping its head, caused it suddenly to turn aside.

When Gert, with a smother of foam, came up in an ecstasy of terror, there was nothing to be seen of the snake; but they hurried on their course, which led along a widening ledge, and were glad to find themselves again on dry ground in the light of day. They looked back into the gloomy cañon, then stepped into the valley, and found they were still in a land of marvels.

The walls curved away on either side in a wide sweep, and towered high overhead, streaked with veins of quartz, and coloured red and yellow in patches. Above was the cloudless sky, of a glorious purple almost, and the face of the cliffs on the southern side glowed in the brilliant sunshine.

The air about them was sweet with the scent of flowers, and when they brought their eyes down from feasting on the noble sky, they saw fruit glowing golden among shining leaves, and the white blossom on the same trees

—the blossom of the orange, for its sweetness dedicated to brides.

Beyond these were the silken leaves of banana plants bending over their smooth stems, and sheltering great bunches of yellow fruit. There were guavas, too, and loquats, and the scented citron, and apricots smelling sweet and rich, and pomegranates, whose bursting skins disclosed the red fruit within.

With a childish cry of pleasure, for their natures craved for the pure fruit, they never stopped to think how these trees had come there, but ran forward to eat, clutching greedily at everything in reach, and running from tree to tree, with quick glances here and there as though they feared some interruption.

Presently, as he stood with the red juice of a pomegranate running through his fingers, Smedley noticed a certain orderliness in the rows of trees, and the fruit dropped unnoticed from his hand.

Surely some one had tended these trees: there were people within that rock-bound valley, and, after all, the forest was not given up to the dead alone! He started forward with a new light in his eyes, and soon passed out from among the fruit-laden trees into an open space, traversed by a path which had been newly-trodden, for the peel of an orange studded it here and there with splashes of yellow and white.

Quickly he ran across, with a hundred vague hopes and desires filling his breast, for now that he was assured there was another person in that forest, he felt it must be the man he had been so long seeking. As he crossed the open space, the cause of his mission, and its object, with

all its consequences and its disasters, rushed upon him. He thought of Grace Elton, of Miss de Beer, of Drury lost and dead, and there was a fierce desire in him to learn all that remained to be learned that very minute. He had been patient so long, had kept on steadily fighting against despair, and now his patience was swept away by an impetuous desire.

Eagerly he parted the bushes on the farther side, ran along a winding path, and burst out into another clearing. There was a building in it, but it was old—old, as was plain from its strange design—and great blocks of stone on which it rested, and from the stone god which stood beside it, obese and horrible.

The very age of the building blighted him, and the fury of his impatience died away before these stones, in whose presence all his hopes were *unreal*. He walked up heavily to the tower, and feared, as he looked in at the low dark door, to meet the hollow eyes of the dead, or to see some strange living form.

But the place was deserted. The tower was cylindrical at its base to a height of twelve feet, thence it tapered to a point some fifty feet above the ground. There were lozenge-shaped designs on the stones, but no other ornamentation, and the interior was plain, the walls burnt as if by fire.

He heard Gert calling out, and returned to find the old man following on footprints which led away from the fruit-trees to a precipitous wall on the left.

"They," muttered Smedley, "are not of the past. We shall find who made them, never mind what mysteries occur."

Following the footprints, they entered under a wide and

high ledge, which ran like a cloister along the base of the cliff. The space beneath was covered with fine white sand, and was broad enough for three horsemen to ride abreast.

They soon saw that the whole gallery had been hewn out, for at regular intervals buttresses were left. All the time the gallery curved to the rounded face of the cliff, so that they could never see more than three hundred paces ahead.

Next they noticed on the smooth walls lines in red and black, which on closer inspection proved to be drawings of animals, among which figured the horse, proving they were not the work of Bushmen. About the majority of these rock paintings there was no special merit, but presently Smedley's attention was attracted by a life-like sketch upon a broad stone. Within a square of lozenge-shape signs, was a picture of a broad river running into the sea, with a fleet of high-prowed galleys entering the mouth, their red and purple sails full blown. On a raised deck on the foremost boat, with a canopy above her head of flaming wings, was a queenly woman, seated on a chair of gold, supported on tusks of ivory. Upon the shore were crowds of people, and soldiers with spears and helmets. In the distance marched a long line of naked people bearing tusks, plumes of the ostrich, and bunches of quills filled with gold-dust, for it was the custom, as Smedley knew, for the natives to store the dust in the quills of birds. On a prominent rock stood a priest, dressed in black, with a long conical cap of felt.

On another slab was represented an orator, a general addressing from his stand upon a stone pillar an army assembled within a natural amphitheatre.

While gazing entranced at these drawings, whose outlines were so preserved that it was possible to trace the expression of fiery enthusiasm in the orator's face, they heard soft sounds coming apparently from behind the solid rock. At first they were indistinct, blending in one unintelligible but musical cadence, like the murmuring of water, but soon they took distinct and harmonious form, yet, all the time, attenuated, unreal, without body, the mere breathing and echoes of living sounds.

The music ceased, or rather died away like a gentle sigh, so gradually that the ear could scarcely follow the notes to their ending; then broke out anew, fitfully, in a wail of agony, and dropped to a murmur, and died away again.

The wanderers looked around for the origin of these mysterious sounds, but could see nothing but the white stretch of sand before them, and the silent rocks. They ran out into the open, and gazed up the cliff and over the valley, but nothing stirred, and they went back into the gallery to listen again.

Long they stood with lips parted and heads inclined, listening, and there came to them distinctly a deep, long-drawn sigh, so distinct they almost felt the breath, so pitiful, that it stirred their hearts.

Smedley passed his hand across his brow with a troubled look in his eyes. "What can it be?" he muttered.

"It is the spooks," said Gert, solemnly. "The baas remembers he heard them that morning on the height. They will kill us slowly with sweet sounds."

"Hush! hark! there it is again!"

The music sounded again, this time clearer, but with the same want of substance in it. Then on their wonder-

ing ears there broke most strange and beautifully sweet, yet shadowy too, the notes of a human voice.

With a thrill of surprise, almost of alarm, Smedley recognized the tune, then heard those familiar words, that jingle of rhyme—

“Those bells of Shandon,
They sound so grand on
The pleasant waters of the River Lee.”

They drew together with a stirring in their hair, for nowhere could they see any living being, and the sounds appeared to come from out of the very wall itself. Music without instruments, words without voices, this was unnatural. The solitude of the forest in which they had been steeped for several days, and the signs of death dating from the remote past, had impregnated their beings with a melancholy that predisposed them to superstition.

Gert ran out into the open, and looked back frightened at the frowning precipice, while his master beat against the rock, and cried out to those who were hidden. Then he walked quickly along the gallery with wild looks.

The sounds were not again repeated, and when Smedley had gone some way he called to Gert, who was still standing gazing in fear at the cliff. Hearing his master but imperfectly, the old man stepped into the gallery again, and looked along the sand to where Smedley stood in the distance.

“It is a bad business,” muttered the old man. “I would give all that ivory yonder to be out in the plains.”

“What is that you say?” came in answer to him.

Gert jumped round to see who had spoken, but finding no one he fled again with a cry into the open.

Smedley ran down to him, his face cleared and smiling.

"I see now what it is, Gert."

"I know well," whispered the old man, moistening his lips, "it is the duivel, he just now spoke to me."

"It was I who spoke. Come and see for yourself. Come, nothing will hurt you. Now you stand there, and I will go a hundred spaces, then I will whisper to you, and you will hear."

Smedley went eagerly away, until Gert, with his ear to the rock, and a look of pitiful alarm on his face, stood trembling.

His mouth opened, and his wrinkled face became utterly void of expression, when he heard the whisper repeated a hundred yards away, as his master had said.

"It is a whispering gallery," said Smedley, returning; "and the sounds we heard were by real people—and come, let us search for them."

They kept along the gallery, and, to their joy, saw the musician in the distance, a being of flesh and blood, though the face was as beautiful as one of Sir Joshua's angel-boys.

It was the slight figure of a boy they saw, who stood with violin in hand facing them, his curly head bent forward, and his large brown eyes with a wonder in them.

They went towards him slowly, subdued to a reverence by his fragile look. But before they could speak to him, he ran quickly away, through open trees, and into a wide glade.

They followed him to where he entered a pile of huge

rocks, when the vicious ping of a bullet brought them to a halt. They watched the puff of white smoke rise, in a stupor of surprise, so unexpected had been the greeting, when a man stepped out from behind the rock, and advanced with a threatening air, loading his rifle. He came up within a yard of them, then stood with a frown on his black brows.

He was a big, broad-shouldered man, with bared arms, slow of movement, and of ponderous strength. His bronzed and bearded face in repose should be good-tempered, but now his eyes glared, and his mouth was grimly set. Three times he lifted his rifle, and three times he lowered it.

"Why don't I shoot you down like dogs?" he growled.

"Because," said Smedley, smiling, "we are not dogs, and you are not a murderer."

The man winced, and shot a terrible glance at Smedley, then looked round to see if his boy were near.

He dropped his gun, however, and bid them explain how they came there.

Smedley looked steadily into the man's rugged face, then he held out his hand.

"I have come," he said, "to find you—are you not the Fossicker?"

"Keep off!" said the other, in a fierce whisper. "You have come to find me! What is your business? If it is what I expect, I am sorry for you. There is no law here but bush-law; and you will never take me." He fingered his rifle, while his face was resolute, but gloomy.

"I come as a friend," said Smedley—"aye, believe me, a friend of Elton."

The stranger still hesitated to take the proffered hand, and as he stood undecided, the boy came up timidly and laid his hand on the man's brawny arm. At the touch of the delicate fingers a look of wonderful tenderness came into the rugged face.

The boy looked at Smedley, but the large sad eyes wanted intelligence.

"What is it, father?" he said, in soft tones. "Do they bring news of him?"

The father looked at Smedley appealingly, as with a tremor in his deep voice he replied—

"Yes, my child, they bring news."

"Ah, what news?—let them speak it, for long have I waited." He went to Smedley and looked up into his face.

"I don't know you," he murmured; "but your eyes are kind, and you must bring good news."

Smedley looked away from the small face, so wistful with the trembling lips, and so pitiful for the vacant expression in the eyes which were never steadily fixed. The stranger made a gesture with his hand, and wiped a tear from his eye.

"Quick," said the boy, "tell me his message; or perhaps you have a letter, give it me instead."

Smedley brought back his eyes from the father to the boy, not knowing what to do or say. He noticed a spot of red in the smooth cheeks, and marked the heaving breast.

"It is a girl," he muttered; then in a flash he saw that she was yearning for a token from a lover.

He faltered, and turned again to the father.

"You said just now," answered the latter, "you were a friend of Elton; show your friendship now by giving her some sign from him."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Smedley, "why, Owen is—that is, I hoped to hear from you of him."

The girl noted his surprise, and her smooth brow was puckered in lines, while a look of horror gathered in her face.

"Tell her something, man! Don't you see she thinks you have brought bad tidings?" and the stranger, in his agony, stood forward and laid a heavy hand on Smedley's shoulder.

Almost mechanically he drew from his pocket the bit of paper rolled within the quill which convict No. 46 had hidden on Table Mountain, and he gave it to her.

She unrolled the paper, and gazed at it blankly, turning it over and over, then something in the writing seemed suddenly to flash a spark of intelligence into her brain. Her eyes brightened, she gave a startled, wondering glare round, then, with hands pressed to her temples, she reeled.

Her father caught her up, and carried her in his strong arms to the mass of rocks, with a look beckoning Smedley to follow.

Gert brought up the rear, completely mystified, and taking refuge in his oft-expressed opinion that the place was surely bewitched.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FOSSICKER.

“ Deep in the shady sadness of a vale,
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn ;
Far from the fiery noon, and Eve’s one star,
Set grey-haired Saturn, quiet as a stone,
Still as the silence round about his lair.
Forest on forest hung above his head
Like cloud on cloud.”

WHAT Smedley had mistaken for a mass of stone was the ruins of an ancient dwelling-house, two halls of which, with their enormous walls, still remained intact.

In one of these the Fossicker—for, indeed, it was he—laid his daughter on a bed of skins, and stood watching with a great desire to do something for her relief, but with no idea what to do.

Smedley quietly stepped in to his relief, and presently they had the satisfaction of seeing the colour return to her cheeks. Then Smedley went out, and sat on a stone bench, with a feeling of despair at his heart. He had at last found the Fossicker, but now that he had found him he had nothing to look forward to. He sat still, with scarcely sufficient energy left to wonder how that frail girl had reached that frightful solitude.

Presently he heard a step beside him, and looking up, meet the friendly gaze of the Fossicker.

“ She sleeps,” he said, with a smile of intense delight. ‘ Come, let us go into the other room which I use for mine, and your man may prepare some food, if he is not too tired.’ ”

"Meat, is it?" cried Gert. "Ah! that is good news." And the old fellow was happy over a three-legged pot.

In the room they entered was a rough table and bench, a couch made of thongs, and on shelves some brass ornaments, and an image beautifully carved in ivory.

"I found these," said the host, nodding his head at the ornaments, "in a stone box in this room. Now, your hand, friend. It is music to hear you speak. Will you smoke?"

"Smoke!—gracious Heavens, hear him! I've not smelt or tasted tobacco for three weeks."

The Fossicker, with a low laugh, pointed to bunches of dried leaves hanging from the roof.

"My own growing," he said. "I've been wanting for some one to come along and try my weed, I'm proud of it."

Soon they were purring with contentment as they smoked out of cob pipes. And all the time the Fossicker fixed his gaze on Smedley, as though he could not see enough of this new face, and at intervals he would repeat, "So you came all this way to find me—just think of it!—and did find me, too."

When they had smoked, the Fossicker watched Smedley eat, and after that they told their stories.

The life of the Fossicker had been full of the ups and downs of a miner's life. He had worked at Ballarat in its early days, had made a fortune and lost it amongst the reckless diggers of California, and for seven years had been fossicking in the Transvaal, *i.e.*, hunting for wash-gold in

the crevices of rocks, with varying success, at times earning only his "tucker," at others rising to comparative wealth on the discovery of rich "pockets." But though the gold-dust and the nuggets—few and far between—were slow to come, they were quick to go. Not in canteens, for he was not a bar loafer, but in relieving the wants of the unsuccessful. The Fossicker, as he was called among the floating population at the diggings, had a soft heart and a free hand. The needy and the sick found a helper in him, and he was preyed upon by the thriftless.

"I had," he said, "got together a fairish pile, and then a fit of lonesomeness seized me. It caught me by the heart, so that I could not work, but would sit on a rock with my chin in my hand for hours. Stranger, I thought I was wrong, but it broke me down, and I walked right into Pretoria, a hundred miles, to call on my daughter Jessie. She was at school in Capetown, she left all—friends, comfort, books, society, all that is life to a young girl, to come up to this forsaken country. Ay, it was selfish of me—it was cruel."

He got up and went to the door, where he made a pretence of looking away under the shade of his hand, but the mist in his eyes belied the action. Coming back, he continued—

"From the day she arrived till now I have suffered for that wrong I did her. Would that I alone had suffered!" He paused again, while his deep chest heaved under the sting of remorse. "When I saw her jump from the coach in that quiet Dutch town, while the young Boers came across to stare, and the fat old women at their doors

smiled for once, I saw that I had done wrong. She was joyous, bright, like a dancing sunbeam in a dark place. Ay, sir, I trembled and turned red like a girl when she smothered her face in my rough beard." He stroked his beard now tenderly, and the memory of that meeting with his lovely child still stirred him with a strange shyness.

"I held her off and looked at her. She seemed of a different mould, with the brightness in her eyes, the pink flush under the white skin coming and going as I looked, and the delicate form. When she spoke, her words came out like music, so that I stood and looked without power of speech, between wonder and admiration. 'Dear father,' she said, with a soft look in her eyes, and a sadness in her voice, 'are you not glad to see me?' I looked at her dazed like, she told me afterwards, and said, 'No, not glad, you must go back again.' It hurt me to say it, stranger, but I knew it would be better for her."

"What did she say?" asked Smedley, as the other paused again.

"Why, bless you," he said, smiling for the first time, "she took a step back, and looked at me steadily, then she said, firm like, 'I am come to stay, you dear old goose, and sew your buttons on.' With that we both laughed, and then up came a young fellow, very firmly set up, and cool as you please.

"'This is Mr. Elton, father,' said Jessie, speaking quickly, 'he was very kind to me on my way up.' I learnt afterwards, for neither he nor she told me, that he had protected her from a scoundrel named Foster—the same you mentioned. I took to him then, for you could see honesty, with a little pride maybe, and strong will

writ in his face. Well, sir, to cut this story short, I took my Jessie to Pilgrim's Rest, and, with shame I can never forget, showed her into my home—a simple tent. Fool that I was, I never thought that such a home was not fit for a young girl.

“Would you believe it,” he continued, with something like reverence in his tone, “she never winced when she saw the home I was taking her to? She clapped her hands, and said it was delightful. Bless her! She helped me build a hut for myself, and decorated the walls with little odds and ends from her store. Her tent always looked like a flower-show inside, and sometimes on a Sunday the diggers would come up, and one by one they would take their hats off and look in at the prettiness, but they had no eyes but for her—the sweetest flower in the land. Ah! stranger, there was never a man among them but worshipped her; and Fighting Dan—the roughest customer in the country—would walk for miles to get her a lily. We lived so for six months, and in spite of her brave heart, I could see she was pining; just fading away silently.”

He got up, and looked into the other chamber.

“She is sleeping,” he whispered, coming back. “Well, sir, one day Elton came to us; he had been travelling, and showed me some nuggets he had found up north. He made some talk of a treasure. He was with us a week, and the diggers were mightily put out because he was always with Jessie. Then he brought her to me, and asked if he could have her for his own. I am slow to think, stranger, and I kept them waiting for my answer until she grew white, and he had to hold her up. Slow

to think," he muttered; "the thought that she was to leave me burnt right through before I could consent.

"Ay," he continued, "woman's nature is not man's, and difficult to understand. I never saw Jessie cry before—but when I said yes, he could take her, she just wept. As we stood there, we two men looking as foolish as women at her tears, Fighting Dan came up at the head of the whole camp, and says he, fierce like, 'Boys, there's lynching wanted here.' But, bless you, she smiled at them through her tears.

" 'Brothers,' she said, taking Elton's hand, 'this is to be my father's son, so shake hands and be good friends.' Waal, they each took Elton's hand, looking glum, but when they finished I saw him rub his fingers, and put his hand in his pocket, for it was all limp with the crushing. Then the boys went off, and on the next Sunday they came up, and each one on passing the tent dropped a nugget into a little basket swinging by the door. They gave one rousing cheer for 'Sweet Jessie,' and went away. They tolerated Elton, but they never took to him," he added, musingly.

"After this, Elton went to Kimberley to get together wagon and outfit for this treasure up north, and we never saw him again. Jessie kept her spirits up, but there was a far-away look in her eyes that troubled me. At last the end came. One afternoon I went back to the tent, heavy at heart from thinking of Jessie's sadness, and prepared to take her away to Capetown. She did not come to meet me, but I saw a strange man walking away from the tent, walking leisurely; nothing strange, for new-comers often chanced by our camp just to see if Jessie was so pretty as

the boys made out. When I came to the door I saw her stretched out on the floor in a swoon. There was a piece of paper in her hand, held tight. I loosened it, and read this." He took a piece of paper from his pocket, and handed it to Smedley.

It bore the heading of the Kimberley Club, and read: "Jessie, my dear—Your lover, Elton, has just received five years' hard labour for illicit diamond buying. Cheer up, and believe in the constant affection of yours, J. FOSTER." Smedley's fingers closed in angry grasp over this brutal note.

"Ah!" said the Fossicker, in a low, strained voice, "I see it has aroused you—how much more a father? Sir, I took my weapon and followed the accursed hound. He heard me coming, and waited with a smile on his lips. 'Well,' he said, with a sneer, 'the little girl did not like reading that note. It's true though, for I helped Foster to trap Elton, the fool!' The man was mad to talk to me like that. There was a creek near, known as Dead Man's Creek. I bid him follow me. He refused. I bid him again, and he followed like a dog."

He paused, and Smedley leaned breathlessly forward.

"We reached the creek, and I told him to draw his pistol. I said I would step off twenty yards and turn. He consented, and I noticed a grin on his evil face when I turned. I counted as I paced—my voice seemed to belong to another. At 'fifteen' I heard a click, and then a stinging pain in my back." He slipped his arm out of his shirt, and showed a cicatrized scar high up on his left shoulder."

"What then?" asked Smedley breathlessly.

"I turned round and fired. He dropped dead. Perhaps," he added, with an anxious glance at Smedley, "you think I should have paced the other five yards before firing?"

"No; you did right. He would have murdered you had you not fired."

"That is what the boys said when I took them where the body lay, with a bullet through its forehead. They left it unburied. I had no sorrow for the dead man then; but since, the image of him, unburied and stark, has been with me."

"Let your mind rest," said Smedley, "I buried him." He described the scene in Dead Man's Creek.

"I'm glad of that," said the other, musingly—"right glad, for though the poor creature, in a way, brought trouble upon us, it was unchristian to let him lie like a dead dog, without so much as saying a prayer over him.

"Well, sir, for days after that life was like the sea in a mist—dull, dreary, and hopeless. I sat watching by poor Jessie's bed while she fought with the fever. Sometimes Dan, God bless him, kept watch—ay, many a time when he thought me asleep I saw the tears run down his cheek as he sat there looking upon her thin white face. He would often take her hand in his and trace the veins with his finger, and when, at last, she woke and looked at him with a smile, he fairly broke down." The deep voice of the digger trembled in sympathy at the recollection of Fighting Dan conquered by a smile.

"She recognized me, too, and then, with a great cry, she called out upon Elton, and ever since she has been in

darkness of mind. My sweet Jessie! Well," he continued, after a painful pause, "if that blow was not enough, I heard that Foster had stirred up the officers at Pretoria to hunt me down for the death of his messenger. The boys offered to stand by us, but I turned my child into a boy, and we started one night, without warning to any, for the forest. Jessie had got a plan of the treasure which Owen gave her, and we came to this place, and here we have lived for nearly five years—five mortal years, without setting eyes on other living form until you came.

"Yes, for five years—for five long years," he added slowly; "and if it had not been for Jessie and her music—for God spared her that—I would have gone mad in the first year. Lately she has been asking for Elton, and has grown more restless. May God grant that your coming will lift the cloud from her mind."

The Fossicker ceased his narrative, but he had by no means told all. Smedley, looking at the rugged face, and tender, wistful look that came into the father's eyes as he spoke of his daughter, had some glimmering of the wonderful love and patient watchfulness which had shielded the young girl year after year in that lonely retreat.

"What do you do with yourself here?" asked he, wonderingly, as from the door he looked up at the frowning walls.

"Come," said the Fossicker, "I will show you." Together they went off towards the south side of the kloof, leaving Gert examining the fiddle with an air of great interest. They reached the wall at a point where a clear stream gushed from the rock, and ran through a stone trough. Smedley saw that the trough was several feet in

length, and that it opened into a large shallow basin. He looked interrogatively at his companion.

"That is for gold-washing," said the Fossicker, answering the look; "it was made by the same people who built that tower we have just left, maybe hundreds of years back. I use it also for gold-washing." He led the way round a large rock, and through a cleft, which stretched for a hundred feet up the precipice. They found themselves in a huge cavern, but instead of continuing on, they mounted up by means of niches in the rock, passed through the roof of the cavern at the point where the cleft pierced it, and stepped on to a broad ledge.

From this ledge Smedley looked into large workings in the face of the precipice, and, on entering one of them, he saw that the rock was of quartz, veined with strings of dull yellow.

"Gold," said the Fossicker, in a tone of voice a surfeited boy might use in mentioning pudding.

Smedley went from one working into another, and in every one the veins and bunches of the precious metal traced patterns on the walls. There was wealth beyond the dreams of avarice, if it could only be won from the hard rock; but where were the tools?

"Ah! I brought my fossicking tools with me, and five of those leadings I have cut out of the rock, one for each year. It was hard work to do without blasting-powder, but you see the face of the wall from exposure is cracked, and easier to work upon. It was harder and slower work crushing, until I forged a hammer out of the metal itself."

They went down again to a rocky platform at the base of the cliff, where quartz ore was piled up. The Fossicker lifted a hammer and handed it silently to Smedley. The handle was of iron-wood, and the hammer a mass of pure gold.

Smedley looked at this marvellous sledge-hammer, which must have been worth one thousand pounds, in amazement. The Fossicker took it, swung it lightly round and round, until it described a glittering, glowing circle.

"I have swung that hammer day after day, crushing tons of rocks, until sometimes, stranger, I have felt that the thing was alive. I piled up dust enough in the first twelve months to satisfy me and Jessie for life, if ever we are to get out of this living tomb, but that hammer drew me on to work. At last, sir, I got to know what it meant when it flashed and crashed. Ay," he continued, with a strange smile, as he noticed Smedley elevate his brows, "it did talk. Sometimes it told me of poor girls and boys whose minds were darkened like my sweet Jessie's, and then we struck hard to get the yellow dust for their benefit. Sometimes it spoke of lonely women, of crippled men, of orphans, always of the weak and the suffering, and we have piled up dust for them all—dust that will mean comfort and rest."

Smedley looked with something like reverence upon the sad, rough face of the big man, who was now gazing away up to the sky, in a fit of abstraction born of years of loneliness.

Presently, waking from his reverie, the miner laid down his hammer and removed a stone slab, disclosing a

hole, into which he plunged his arm and drew out a handful of gold-dust. He held it up to the astonished gaze of Smedley, then carelessly let the yellow dust pour in a glittering stream between his fingers.

"There is enough in there to ransom a king, or pay an army."

Smedley thought of Owen Elton and the convict No. 46. He told the Fossicker of his interview with the convict at Capetown.

"What manner of man was he?" asked the other, with excitement.

Frank described the man.

"It was the boy himself!" said the Fossicker, hoarsely. "Ah! I am certain as I am that the sun will rise to-morrow that we were tricked into breaking the law by Foster. If I were free I would get at the truth of the case, and bring him back to Jessie. The sight of him would bring her to herself."

He went off with his head down, and Smedley followed, busy with a troop of thoughts, impressions, and hints that tumbled over each other in a confused jumble, but out of which presently came a clear determination to seek out Foster at Kimberley, and to hurry on to Capetown with the results of his investigations.

Events were transpiring elsewhere which tended to strengthen his resolution and add to his responsibilities. He reached the miner as he was entering the open space, and both paused to listen to lively strains of music borne on the still air.

"Listen," said the Fossicker, breathlessly, "she is playing a new air. It must be that her senses have re-

turned." The light of hope flared up in his face, and he ran until close up to the tower, then stood bitterly disappointed.

It was not Jessie who was playing, but Gert. The old man, who possessed a native gift for music, common with others of his race, was perched on a stone, and drawing forth the quick notes of a gay jig.

As they stood, hid from view by a tree—the Fossicker's face showing how the notes jarred on his spirit—Gert stepped down from the stone and played a polka, to which he gravely capered. As he moved slowly round, with a look of portentous solemnity on his mahogany face, Jessie, in her boy's clothing, came to the door. At first she looked with surprise at the gyrating figure, then broke into a peal of laughter.

Gert paused, with one foot poised in the air, and twisted his head to glance over his shoulder. The action was too much, he overbalanced, and suddenly sat down—hard.

Jessie ran forward. "I am sorry I startled you; but you took me by surprise. Where is my father?"

Gert, who felt dumbfounded in the presence of the boy-girl, as he called her, jerked his head in the direction the Fossicker had taken.

"He knows you are here, then?" She looked at the old hunter curiously. "I have a shadowy recollection of having seen you before; but—everything appears new to me. It seems to me," she mused, "that I have seen this wild place in my dreams." Her eyes fell upon the fiddle held in Gert's hands. "Shall I play to you?" He gave it her, and she played an air on the awakening of the day—the same, whispered the

Fossicker to Smedley, that she would sometimes play to the miners.

First there was the sighing and moaning of the morning wind, laden with the sorrow of the night, merging into the sweet plaintive song of the robin, first herald of the dawn, anon swelling into the joyous notes of the thrush, and finally bursting into a pæan of praise, as the sun rushed up, broad and resplendent, into the heavens. The player paused, with flushed cheeks and kindling eye, then the longing of her heart spoke in the pathetic air of an old love-song. As the fiddle wailed and cried like a living thing, Gert began to sob audibly and unrestrained, all that was soft in his tough old heart moved by the human pain and suffering expressed in the air.

The Fossicker shook like an aspen leaf, while hope and fear alternated on his face with the rapidity of cloud chasing sunshine on an April day. "God be thanked," he murmured, "her memory has been restored!"

He stepped from behind the bush and held out his arms, with a yearning look on his face. "Jessie!" he called.

With a cry she ran to him—love and heaven-given intelligence lighting up her face.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE HOMESTEAD.

For a few days more Smedley remained in the kloof, exploring and making notes of the old workings and rock pictures of the forgotten people who had made the place their headquarters hundreds of years ago. Sometimes he

was accompanied by Jessie, always by the Fossicker, whose nature was like a rich lode, streaked with wealth, and they talked untiringly of Elton, of his father and sister, and tried to school themselves to the thought of parting soon.

One morning the little group stood on the border of the forest and looked back in silence upon the sombre woods that had shut them so long from the sun. The sad spirit of the trees yet lingered on their faces, which in the broad light of the plain looked pale and worn. They stood in silence for several minutes, a silence eloquent with feelings too deep for words, then Smedley laid his hand in that of the Fossicker, and the two men looked each other in the eyes.

"Remember," said Smedley, "I will return in six months, and I will answer for Jessie to you, as though she were my sister."

"I am content," replied the Fossicker, looking steadily into the clear grave eyes. "A man who has done as much as you have for a friend will protect a motherless girl."

With a parting pressure, Smedley turned away, leaving father and daughter to say good-bye.

"Father," said Jessie, in sweet, pleading tones, "what will you do without me? Take me back. I can wait. I cannot bear to think of you wandering lonely about that silent kloof."

The strong man fought with a choking sensation at his throat. He would not sadden his little girl needlessly, and smiled, though he could not trust himself to speak, lest the tremor of his voice should betray his sorrow.

"There will be no one to play to you. Oh, it will be horrible—I cannot go!"

"The parting is bad enough, Jessie," he said, gently, "without bringing up all the evils of my coming loneliness. Besides, sweetheart, you left your fiddle for me, and I will scrape acquaintance with that." He smiled faintly at his feeble joke, and stroked her hair, still short and curly.

"Then," he continued, with assumed cheerfulness, "there is Vulcan—my old friend the hammer. He and I will have many a talk about you. Ah! little one, don't cry."

As the thought of the pathetic figure swinging and talking to his hammer came before Jessie, she broke down. It was no use. The miner shut his lips tightly, but his chest heaved, and the large tears rolled down his furrowed cheeks.

Hastily with the back of his large hand he brushed the tears away. "It would never do," he said, in his simple way, "to let her last thoughts of me be sad," and he battled with his emotions.

When at last he gently put her away from him, with a gesture that had more of yearning than of repulsion in it, and Jessie went sobbing away, she carried with her the memory of a smile that had seemed to hallow her father's face.

The Fossicker stood upon the edge of the forest, with that same smile on his rugged features, and watched them—turning ever and again to look back at him—their figures growing smaller and smaller, until they merged into one blur, and finally were blotted out in the distance.

He looked around through the mist that came over his eyes, shivered at the dreary aspect, then with bowed head turned, and the dark woods closed him in.

For ten days the little party of three went south, walking slowly, for Jessie, though she never complained, moved languidly.

She seldom spoke, and she walked for hours without noticing things about her. At night, too, she would sit looking into the fire, her arms clasped round her knees, and the small chin resting on her hands. Her mind had not groped about in darkness for five years without retaining some shadowy impressions of that period. A fleeting and pathetic look of perplexity haunted her eyes, so that Smedley, sometimes catching the fixed and wondering gaze, grew alarmed.

His secret watchfulness and ceaseless concern for her kept his thoughts from all else. Gert, too, was her devoted slave. He always had some dainty for her breakfast or supper—a fat Namaqua partridge, a plover, or a young knorhaan; he made her a shelter at night, and always had water for her when he and his master went without, though their lips blistered and cracked for want of moisture. A radiant smile and soft word of thanks were payment more than sufficient for the old heathen who had found another idol.

On the morning of the eleventh day when they started the two men saw with consternation that the young girl had overtaxed her powers. She could hardly move her limbs, and limped painfully.

“Ah! my poor child, we have hurried you too much.”

"It is very silly of me," replied Jessie, suppressing a sob; "but my feet have been swelling."

"Good heavens!" muttered Smedley, remorsefully, "what an idiot I have been to make you walk so long without a rest."

"Yah," interposed Gert, in fiery indignation, "you is a born mule!"

Jessie laughed at the old man's audacity. "This will never do," she said. "I must not prove a bone of contention between you. After a short rest I shall be all right again."

Neither a short rest nor a long one brought her relief, and master and man set their wits working. By and by Gert went off to a patch of green some way off, and returned at sunset with a string of teal from the vley, and a bundle of long grass.

The next day he was seen plaiting grass, Smedley assisting under his direction, but with such awkward fingers as to draw upon him severe remarks—none the less applicable to him because addressed, apparently, to the air. Jessie watched with growing amusement, then joined in herself, greatly to Gert's admiration.

Out of the plaits Gert skilfully wove a large shallow basket. Then he selected two mimosa trees with the straightest stems, cut them down, peeled the bark off, and swung the basket between. He next made shoulder guards out of the remaining grass, and the hammock was ready.

Jessie made no demur about stepping in, when Smedley, with a courtly sweep of his battered hat, informed her "ladyship that the sedan chair was at her service." With

a curtsey—that lost none of its charm because there were no skirts to stretch—and with a colour that glowed through the sun-browned cheeks, she seated herself in the roughly-made basket. The poles were lifted, nicely adjusted, and the two men, proud as though they were bearing a queen, stepped off, keeping time and space so that their precious burden should not be unnecessarily jolted.

Their progress was necessarily slow, but still they covered ground steadily, Jessie sometimes cheering her bearers with a song. On the seventeenth day, from her perch, for though she persisted she could walk they would carry her, she saw a white spot far away in a valley, appearing and disappearing as she swung to and fro. Now she saw Smedley's broad back; now, as she swung out, the white spot came into view; and now, at last, when she was sure of it, she clasped her hands and called "a house! a house!" with a quiver in her voice, as a shipwrecked mariner might call "a sail!"

They put down the basket gently, and feasted their eyes upon that home below. They marked the blue smoke lazily rising in a thin line until it caught a current of air; they saw the cattle returning to the kraal, the sheep in a dull white patch, spread out fan-shaped, slowly feeding; they saw the dam lying, like a silver shield, in a hollow from which a dark patch of trees stretched up to the house; and they saw a string of dark forms—"servants," said Gert—winding up from the water to a cluster of huts. A horseman approached the house as they looked, and they heard the far-off bark of the dogs which went out to greet him.

"And that," said Jessie, laying her hand on Smedley's

arm in her excitement, "what is that?" as the flutter of something white caught her eager eye.

"It is a lady, missy," said Gert, whose sight was as keen as a hawk's. "See, there is a little one running to her."

A mother—a home—what did not these mean to this motherless girl? She clasped her hands together, and again the tears quivered on her long lashes.

"Courage, my little sister," said Smedley.

"Ah! my brother," she said, turning on him a look whose meaning he could not fathom, "it is not with pain I weep, but it is so long since last I heard a woman's voice." Then, quickly—fearing lest he should think she had blamed her father ever so slightly—"Not that I have wanted for love, or sympathy—ah, no!"

She said she would walk to the house. So they went down the hill quickly, Gert carrying the basket, for Jessie, knowing that it would please the old man, said she would keep it in memory of his kindness to her. Long before they reached the house the sun blazed, blood-red, from the horizon, cast his level rays over hill and valley, then swiftly vanished, and darkness brooded over the land.

Out of the night presently shone two flickering lights, and towards them they steered their way. The noises of the farmyard came to them more and more distinctly with a cheerful sound of home. They could presently distinguish the baas of the horned ram from the complaining tenor of the ewe, and the plaintive bleat of the lambs; then, as they approached nearer, they heard the sighing of contented cattle, and the subdued cackling of some drake, uneasy about his ducks, who would sleep outside the pen.

Then their footfalls caught the ear of a prowling dog and his growl was the signal for a chorus of barking.

A door was opened, and a flood of light streamed forth. "Who is there?" said a deep voice, in Dutch.

"Friends," answered Gert, also in Dutch.

"So, come on then—Voetsack, you dogs!"—this to the curs.

Jessie showed a strange reluctance to proceed. She hung back, overcome by a new sense of shame at the thought of facing her own sex when in her boy's apparel.

Smedley took her by the hand to reassure her, and she whispered, as though shy of him, too, now, "Don't tell them I am a girl."

He felt a wave of pity for her, and intuitively gave her the reply that restored her composure.

"Trust me, my brother," he said. She released her hand, and gently patted his. Henceforth there was a bond between them that might on his part have grown into love warmer than a brother's.

They passed up the steps of the stoep, and the man at the door, holding the light above his head, examined them in silence.

"Who are ye?" he said presently, in Dutch. "Where did you come from, and where are you going?"

"We are travellers," replied Gert; "we come from the north, we are going to Kimberley; and though we look poor, we have plenty of gold-dust." The latter information he added as a recommendation.

Whether it proved as such, or whether the man was satisfied that he had not to deal with dangerous characters, he bade Gert go round to the kitchen, and invited the others in.

The room they entered was large, scantily furnished, and without a carpet. The earthen floor was smeared with cowdung, which drying, formed a hard, smooth surface. A settee, with the bottom made of raw hide thongs in place of cane, was ranged against the wall, the back of it covered with a kaross of angora skins. Two or three chairs, a rough table, a Swiss clock on the mantelshelf, a rough sketch of General Joubert on the wall, a trophy of antelope horns and assegais, and an armoury of guns completed the furniture and fittings. On the table was a haunch of venison, from which evidently the man was just eating. He left the room for a minute, returned with two plates, a jug of milk, and gravely signified to his two visitors to take their seats. A native servant followed with a large dish of yellow peaches, and rolls of pressed apricot. They sat in silence, Jessie making pretence at eating, for her excitement killed her appetite, and Smedley glancing up occasionally with a puzzled expression at his host.

The latter took a mighty quaff from the jug, then stared at Jessie in a manner that caused the blood to mount hotly into her cheeks.

"Drink," he said, suddenly, in English, setting the jug down before her.

Without hesitation, she took it up with both hands, lifted it to her lips, and it was considerably lighter when she put it down. There was a lurking smile about her mouth that reassured Smedley, and he admired the readiness with which she had conquered her shyness to please her host.

"Good," said the latter; "now some peaches."

She selected a large one, opened it, took the stone out, and handed the fruit to him.

He laughed a hearty rafter-shaking laugh, which set them at ease with each other. Both Smedley and Jessie found the peaches a rare treat after their long abstinence from fruits of any kind; and their host amused himself opening peach after peach for them, until he had reared up a pyramid of stones.

"Now for a smoke," he said, standing up to reach for a roll of Boer tobacco, "and then a talk."

There was something in the great stature of the man that seemed familiar to Smedley, and now that he saw him plainly he was convinced he had seen him before. But where? The scene in the gardens at Capetown flashed before him, and he leapt to his feet.

"Why, surely your name is Beyers?"

"Yes," said the Dutchman slowly, taken rather aback.

"Then don't you know me—Smedley?"

Beyers put his pipe on the table, laid a huge hand on each of Smedley's shoulders, shouting out, "Here he is; Sannie—mother—I have got him!" half led, half dragged Smedley into another room.

Running back to the room, he danced round the table like a sportive elephant, caught up the amazed Jessie, and set her down all flushed and frightened before a dear old lady—who had just been roused out of a doze, and thought the end of the world was at hand.

Well, it was a scene to confuse the old dame. There was her daughter, Sannie, laughing and crying while shaking hands with a bronzed and tattered stranger; there was her son Stoffel laughing boisterously at the door; and before

her was a beautiful boy, with large brown eyes that looked wonderfully sweet. She did the most natural thing under the circumstances—held out her arms.

“My dear neef, come and tell me what this means, since they have all lost their senses.”

By her actions Jessie would, to an unmoved observer, have betrayed her sex. She knelt at the mother’s feet, and buried her face in her lap. There was something in this response to her call which won the mother’s affections, and awakened memories of a long past when others came to her for comfort. Her withered fingers played among the short curly locks, as she listened to Sannie’s explanations.

“And who is this?” she said to Smedley.

“He is my brother,” he said, mendaciously, “whose history I must tell you another time, for the tale is long.”

“Wonderful!” murmured Sannie, “but you have not said a word about your friend.” Here she checked herself, and whispered a word to her brother, who was smiling in a large way that might be described as all over his face.

Whatever it was she told him, it let loose again the flood of his mirth, and he had to go into the next room to give free vent to his delight.

The sitting-room was comfortably furnished, and bore signs of a cultured taste. Among the furniture was a piano, and when Jessie ventured to look around, this seemed to have a fascination for her. At last, obeying some overmastering impulse, she sat down to it, and sang “Home, sweet Home,” in a voice that held them spell-bound, brought Stoffel to the door in a state of subdued wonder, and hushed the babble in the kitchen.

"He has surely dropped from the skies," said the old lady, breaking the silence which ensued, "for truly it was like an angel singing."

Sannie looked at this marvellous boy wonderingly, and wanted him to go to her, but he preferred sitting by her mother. Yet he looked timidly at Sannie, and she looked at him, until they smiled, and blushed, and smiled again, whereat Stoffel at the door smacked his huge thigh in great but stupid enjoyment.

"Old man," he said to Smedley, "you are out of it. And I know another who will find his nose dislocated. Ah, ah, ah! Ha, ha, ha!" This last burst called out by an emphatic "hush!" from his pretty sister.

"Now, my children," said the old lady, "we must turn our thoughts to God." She wiped her horn-rimmed glasses, called for her English Bible, and read a chapter right through slowly, as one with whom the words were strange, for Dutch was her language.

"You must be tired," she said, including her two guests, "so go to your sleeping chamber at once, Stoffel will show you."

Jessie flushed painfully, and gave an alarmed look at Smedley. By keeping her secret she had placed herself in an awkward predicament; it was one thing to sleep beneath the stars by the camp fire with Smedley and his servant near, but quite another to have him as a companion in a room.

"I don't think I will sleep indoors to-night," said Smedley to Mrs. Beyers. "You know I have passed so many nights in the open, that I could not bear the closeness of a room. I will sleep on the stoep."

Jessie thanked him with a look, but Mrs. Beyers lifted her hands in surprise.

“Well, you English have strange fancies. Travellers, as a rule, are only too glad to feel a soft feather bed beneath them. Well, well, the bench is hard, and you will be sore to-morrow.”

The bench was hard indeed, and even the approval of his conscience could not prevent his hip-bone and elbow suffering from the inhumanity of a plank-bed. He woke up with a stiffness in his limbs that kept him on the stoep next day, when Stoffel rode off on a mysterious mission, and Sannie and Jessie strolled into the garden, still rather shy of one another.

As he sat smoking, lazy as the hound which stretched itself at his feet, with his hat tilted over his eyes to shut out the glare, his feet on the rail among the flowers of the trailing egg-fruit, and his hands at the back of his head, with Gert squatting on the steps, also in perfect enjoyment of his pipe, he became aware of a steady galloping above the drowsy humming of bees.

Two horsemen came up with the usual reckless gallop of young Boers, and the hound, lazily lifting his head, twitched his nostrils in a feeble effort to sniff the air, made a still more feeble attempt at a bark, and let his head fall again.

Smedley was too comfortable to stir, and Gert was absorbed in watching a very small wasp trying to bury a very large spider in a private vault.

They heard one of the horsemen advance, they heard him stop, and then they heard him drawl—

“Well, Stoffel, you certainly have secured a fine pair of

scarecrows ; but I'm hanged if I can see what special interest they have for me ! ”

Gert sprang up with a yell of delight ; Smedley capsized his chair, and the dog ran off barking furiously

“ Eh ! ” remarked the new-comer, “ what the devil's up ? What ? Gert—Smedley, dear old boy,” and Drury was clasping his friend's hand once again. Not with the right hand, however, for the sleeve pinned across his breast was empty

Gert walked on his hands and waved his veldschoens in the air, while the giant Stoffel could not see how to unbuckle the girth for the mist in his eyes.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DRURY'S STORY.

THE two friends, again reunited, had been telling their adventures since they last met, when Gert, edging by inches along the stoep, suddenly laid a finger upon Drury's empty sleeve.

“ Het es ker-vite gone, sieur ? ”

“ Yes, Gert ; it will no longer encircle a waist in the mazy dance.”

“ Dot is very bad, sieur,” replied the old fellow, seriously, “ very bad ; it is nice to squeege a fat gal when the concertina plays in the moonlight.” The old Don Juan gave such a sentimental sigh, and the picture of the fat coloured wench called up by his words contrasted so ludicrously with the image in Drury's mind, that the two friends laughed immoderately.

"Same as befoah; jes' so fond of laughing, and ladies," remarked Gert, solemnly, at this unseemly mirth, and his comment, of course, increased their delight.

"Where gone to?" he said, referring to the missing limb.

"It was masticated by a lion, absorbed into his domestic economy. I did not know what it was to be annexed before, but henceforth my sympathies are for all people whose annexation is thought desirable by the British Lion. The process is painful."

"Beg pardon," interposed Gert, to whom all this was jargon, "did a lion eat him?"

"You have got hold of the truth, old man. The lion ate the arm, or rather chewed it, and Baas Smedley—so I understand—shot the lion."

"Baas was not all killed?" observed Gert.

"So it would seem; but I have no doubt the brute would have finished the contract by piecemeal if you had not come up. I daresay he would have supped off my leg and dined off my body, for," he said, turning to Smedley, "I was lying helpless near by, under a clump of grass, when you were walking around. I wonder you did not find me."

"I was too excited," said Smedley, "and Gert would not search."

"Yah, sieur," replied the latter, humbly, "I did tink you was all in dot lion. How come the lion he leave baas alone?"

"I see I must tell the story again; but hereafter you must remember that I was born with only one arm. Every man who sees that empty sleeve thinks he has a

right to learn what has become of the arm, and I have been interviewed already by half the people in the Republic, including Oom Paul and a Field Cornet, who wanted to hold an inquest over the absent limb. You see," he continued, accepting a filled pipe from Stoffel, "when that rascal Klaas"——

"Der duivel," interposed Gert, with emphasis, "he is dood."

"When Klaas shot my horse I ran on after the coach, but soon lost my way. I was tired, my leg pained me, and I was hungry; but, above all, as you may suppose, I was filled with fears about the safety of my companions. After wandering around I ran into a thorn tree, and on patiently releasing the crooked thorns from my clothing I groped under the branches, which formed a low roof above me. I slept soundly, and did not hear the slightest noise, until a low growl aroused me. Without rising I looked around drowsily, but could see nothing except the dark outline of the branches against the myriad stars. I was about to close my eyes again when a deep breathing near by, and an unusual pressure on my legs, attracted my attention. I threw out my hand thoughtlessly to feel what it was, and my wrist was seized as in a vice. The horror I experienced at that moment I hope never to feel again. There was no growl or sound from the unknown beast, nothing but the cracking of my bones as he bit through. I was at first paralysed with fear. I could not cry out—I could not feel even—and my eyes seemed turned to stone. This phase was followed by one still more ridiculous. When I recovered my senses I just submitted to be devoured. The brute began passing my

arm through his jaws inch by inch, until he reached the elbow and cracked that. I found tongue, then, and screamed; but the pain nearly made me insensible, when, of course, it would have been all over. I made a great effort, and at last the brilliant idea of defending my life occurred to me. Drawing my revolver with my left hand, I felt about until I got the muzzle into the brute's mouth, and then pulled. He held on until I had fired five shots, then he backed out from the bush and roared until he quite deafened me. By and by he returned to finish me off, but this time I greeted him with both barrels of the gun, which I had managed to lift up and steady with my toes. He knocked the gun away with a blow of his paw, then fell upon it like a mad thing; after which he walked away growling, and sick with the bullets sticking like plums in his jaw.

"Of course there was no more sleep for me. The pain from my shattered arm was terrible, and I longed for water with a longing that increased to a mad desire. Before sunrise, I was licking the dew from the grass, and in this way, without noticing where I was going, wandered some distance from the thorn tree. While at this pleasant occupation I was seen by the lion, who came out of a bush and growled at me. I stared at him stupidly, and he went back towards the bush, standing still at every few steps to look back at me over his shoulder. When he reached the edge of the bush, he sat down on his hams, and looked at me steadily, while the blood tickled slowly from his jaws. I have no doubt he felt bad—something like I did the other day when I got a mouthful of thorns from a prickly pear."

"I am sorry," said Stoffel, with a spreading grin. "I did not think you would be such a greenhorn as to clap an unpeeled prickly pear into your mouth."

"It was ever thus—my trustful disposition is always taken advantage of. As the lion sat looking at me, wondering what sort of a two-legged fraud I was, I cautiously retreated backwards from his royal presence. My exit would have been irreproachable had I not tripped over a tuft of coarse grass, and sat down suddenly. On the other side of the tuft was an ant bear-hole, into which I bodily disappeared, in such a way that my head and feet were together. When the dust cleared away and I could look up, there was Leo gazing down into the hole with an intensely puzzled look on his face. I remember having seen at Wombwell's Show a somewhat similar expression on the features of a lioness who had lost her tail. Upon my word, it made me laugh, and the lion withdrew his head. I spent the day in that hole. I had no idea of putting my head up for fear the lion should snap it off, but most of the time I was partly insensible from pain. In the night I heard the jackals at work, and, caring little what became of me, I crawled out, and went towards the snarling, snapping brutes. They were eating the dead lion. I shot one with my revolver, and drank its blood."

Drury shuddered at the recollection, and passed his hands across his eyes as though to brush away some fearful scene.

"I do not like to think of the miserable days during which I wandered about aimlessly in that desolate wilderness, seeking for some human being to relieve my pain. It was terrible—terrible. The flies swarmed about the

black and festering arm." His voice choked with emotion. "Tell them the rest, Stoffel, I cannot speak of it."

Stoffel's throat was husky, too—he had to cough and blow his nose with affected energy, which brought the water into his eyes.

"Poor Booty," he said, using a term of affection; "it was hard on you. Let me see," he said, musingly, marshalling the facts in his mind. As an aid to memory, he cut off a stick of tobacco, sliced it up, using his left thumb as a prop, and then slowly rubbed the particles round and round between his palms. With much solemnity he filled the bowl, lit it, puffed away for several minutes as though life were unending and impatience an unknown weakness.

"You see," he presently continued, "it was this way. One day I called to Sannie for biltong, for I was going on my round as Field Cornet. You know," he said, looking at Smedley, with a comical air of gravity, "I am Field Cornet for this district. Sannie said there was no biltong. I saw then it was necessary for me to go after wilde-beeste and buffalo among the thorns. I therefore said to myself, I will not collect the taxes now. Government is rich from gold taxes and the farmers are poor. It will not, I said, hurt the Government if I collect no taxes this year. But it will hurt me if there is no biltong. I will, therefore, I said, go hunting."

"A wise and patriotic resolve," interrupted Drury, with gravity.

Stoffel looked at Drury steadily, half suspecting a concealed joke, but as his friend's face was perfectly unmoved he continued, reassured—

"Yes, it was a clever thing, and the farmers all said the same."

"Which, under the circumstances, was not surprising—was it?"

"No," said Stoffel, simply. "They offered to lend me dogs. They were very glad to see me go. I took two wagons, and was away three months. I shot four buffaloes, ten wildebeeste, one rhino, twenty-three springbuck, and one lion—but he was not good for meat, though I sold his skin to an Englishman, who said he would have a big joke with him when he got home. He said he would play the market trick on his friends, but I did not understand."

"Why, don't you know unfortunate sportsmen fill their bags with game bought in the market, and persuade their wives that they shot the same? He would make out he shot the lion."

"Oh!" exclaimed Stoffel, as the light broke upon him; "he shot him! Why, that lion killed my best fore ox, and I was three days after him. I will tell you how I shot him. He shot him, did he!—verdom!"

"Never mind," said Drury, soothingly, "never mind the Englishman; he has probably choked himself with a lie about a big fish he did not catch."

"Well," resumed Stoffel, suppressing his indignation, "while my men were cutting up the meat and drying it, I had some time to spare, and rode off into the plains to see if any ostriches had returned to their old breeding place. There I fell in with some wandering Korannas, who told me there was a sick white man up in the mountains at a kraal. I rode there, and the next day came to an

old kraal beneath a krantz. There I found a white man. Allemagtig ! he was thin—with long hair and wild burning eyes.”

“A worse scarecrow than Smedley is!” observed Drury, in a low voice.

“Ah ! poor Booty,” said the great Dutchman, patting his friend’s hand, “I did not for some time recognize in that living skeleton my gay and smart friend of Capetown. But when I did”——

“You blubbered over me like a great tender-hearted baby. I had an indistinct impression, I believe, that the floodgates were open, and I would be drowned.”

“Ah, well ! smile now, my friend. It was no smiling matter then—a grin would have broken you in pieces, you were that thin. I carried you out into the sunlight from the close hut, and then I saw your arm was gone. Would you believe it, the old man and woman at the kraal buried him in a hole up to his armpits, so that he could not move ; then cut his arm through, and plastered the stump with boiling pap. After all,” he added, reflectively, “niggers have souls. They went without porridge for a week in consequence of that treatment. The ‘ pap ’ formed a thick hard covering over the wound, and it was healed when I found him. The danger was from his weakness—he was very weak in body and mind. My old mother says that it was God’s finger led his straying footsteps to those two old black volk, and she would send a wagon to bring them here, where they could live out the remainder of their life in peace and plenty.”

Stoffel then paused, rammed his forefinger into his pipe, and observed *à propos* of nothing in particular, “A pipe

is a good friend, but a pipe without tobacco is like a lover without a sweetheart."

"He always leaves off there," said Drury, turning to Smedley, with a tremor in his voice, "he has not told you how he nursed me for a month with a woman's care, for all he is so big and rough. Thank God for giving me two such friends."

"A pipe," said Stoffel, fixing his eyes on the roof absently, and sucking without success at the horn stem, "is a good friend, but without tobacco—without tobacco," he observed, varying his simile, which was too poetical to please him, "is like a woman without a kitchen—neither of them good for much without the other."

All, glad of the relief from the depression into which the account of Drury's sufferings had thrown them, laughed boisterously at this quaint conceit.

They chatted on cheerfully for some time, when Stoffel, whose eyes had been fixed upon the garden with absorbing interest, observed that Sannie seemed to be enjoying the peaches.

Drury stood up to examine the peaches, after shooting a quick glance at Smedley, and a look of intense disgust came into his face.

"Who is that presuming youngster down there, Stoffel—one of your numerous neefs or uncles?"

"That is Mr. Smedley's brother," replied Stoffel, innocently.

"The devil it is! He is a surprising child for his age, for he must have been born since last I saw Smedley. You never told me of this interloper, Frank."

"I'll introduce him to you," said Smedley, with a

twinkle in his grave eyes ; “ and he will give you his history. Shall I call him ? ”

“ No,” replied the other, gruffly, “ he is too deeply engaged. ’ Pon my word, he has made great way with Miss Beyers ; I’m damned if he isn’t kissing her ! ”

“ Hush, my dear fellow, don’t disturb the calm of this perfect day ; besides, what can it matter to you ? ”

Drury twirled his moustache viciously ; it evidently mattered a great deal to him.

“ I said some one’s nose would be put out of joint,” observed Stoffel, meditatively.

“ Stoffel,” remarked Drury, severely, “ you are an ass. You are big enough to know that it is not proper for a young lady to put her arm round a boy’s waist.”

“ She isn’t doing that, is she ? ” asked Stoffel, feebly, struggling to suppress a mighty laugh which was already shaking his shoulders.

Drury looked savagely at the big Dutchman, and then turned fiercely on Smedley, who gave vent to his amusement in a startling guffaw.

“ I did not expect this from you,” remarked Drury, in an injured tone.

“ Look, look ! ” interposed Stoffel, with a shriek of laughter, which nearly bent him double, “ they are crying and wiping each other’s tears away.”

“ It is not gentlemanly to make a private scene a subject of brutal merriment,” said Drury, with dignity. “ I will not look at the sickening exhibition.”

After which virtuous resolution he stared all the harder at the two figures, who were now approaching the house unconscious of the sensation they had caused. They

pushed open the gate, and came on slowly, the flush of excitement still in their cheeks.

When, however, they saw the four men on the stoep, it was evident their composure was severely tested, and one of them at least hung back shyly. Sannie's fair cheeks took on a richer hue when she recognized Drury, and in her eyes there was a brighter light; but Jessie, in her boy's suit, was not at ease, her lips were parted, and the colour came and went in flashes, while her brown eyes bore an appealing look. Sannie smiled wickedly when she saw the jealous frown on Drury's face, and pinched Jessie's arm, as she shot an arch look at Smedley. With a curtsy she introduced Jessie as "her dear friend" to Drury, and then before the latter could frame any reply, they both disappeared.

What secrets had they been telling to each other in the peaceful garden, and what transformation was now going on in Sannie's room? Into it went a blushing boy—out of it came a woman serene in her beauty.

The two went off to the old mother's room—Sannie in pink, and Jessie in white muslin. Sannie opened the door softly, saying, "Mother, here is some one come to see you."

The old lady was standing at the window, the light shining on her smooth white hair. Her hands were clasped behind her, and she was looking away into the future. She saw not the distant hills, nor the blue arch of the sky beyond, nor the lambs at play beneath the window, nor the trees in the middle distance slowly nodding their heads in the wind. The light of a good life well spent, of a love that was pure and tender, threw its reflection before. She could with those calm eyes see into the mysterious future

by the glow from the past, and the peace of God that passeth understanding rested on that lonely figure. Jessie, whose heart had been tried by suffering, saw the brooding spirit on the sweet old face. The smile faded from her lips, the expectant look from her eyes, and she stole forward softly with reverence.

Sannie gently closed the door, listened a moment, and walked on tiptoe away, as though afraid to break the spell within the room.

She went out on to the stoep, where the men had grown silent, and leant over the railing where the perfumed honeysuckle twined among the starry flowers of the egg-fruit plant. She was very pleasant to look upon, with her swelling figure, the look of health in her face, and the good humour that lurked in shadowy dimples and shone out of her clear, honest eyes. Drury looked at her, and like a flash of sunlight his gaiety returned.

There was a rustle in the room, a lingering step at the door, and then another lovely girl broke on their astonished view.

Smedley, with something like a look of proud possession, met Jessie, and turning to Drury, whose surprise was none the less complete because he hid it under a courteous demeanour, introduced her as the Fossicker's daughter.

Stoffel gazed upon the small and self-possessed young lady who had appeared in such a mysterious manner with blank amazement, and caught hold of the verandah-post to steady himself. Presently it dawned upon him that he had caught that dainty creature up in his arms the day before, and, with a shudder at his temerity, he slipped gradually down the step and bolted.

At the table in the evening there was a merry company; Drury's sunny eyes gleamed with mischief, while Stoffel even ventured to poke fun at his "Booty." But still there was a sigh in the heart.

"We look before and after,
We pine for what is not;
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught."

Jessie thought of her father alone in that frightful solitude, and Smedley saw that, though his self-imposed task was nearly done, it lacked the full measure of success. There was Elton in prison for some crime unknown, and here before his eyes there was evidence enough that Drury thought no more of the girl he had pledged his troth to.

He sat out on the stoep in the darkness of the summer night, striving in vain to find some comfort for himself out of the tangled threads of this business which had been tacitly shouldered on to him by his friend. He heard Drury's voice mingling with the low, sweet notes of Miss Beyers' in "Ehren on the Rhine." He could not feel it in his heart any more to blame his friend. The finger of fate was visible in the circumstances which led the two together again after their meeting in Capetown; and he felt none of that old indignation that had stirred him before at the thought of Drury's fickleness. Neither did he feel any gratification because his way was clear to him to win Miss Elton if he could. He had no faith in his power to win affection, and a somewhat exaggerated idea of the depth of Miss Elton's love for Drury.

Presently the music ceased, and the three came out. By the law of love, which prompts to action by some secret magnetism, Drury and Miss Beyers went off together.

The ripple of her laughter came back with a silvery tinkle to the two silent watchers on the stoep. They both of them sighed.

"Sannie is happy to-night," murmured Jessie—"very happy. What of happiness, I wonder, is in store for me?"

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN KIMBERLEY.

SMEDLEY passed several days with Drury in a little bungalow that Stoffel had built on his return from Capetown with fresh ideas about the conditions necessary for a bachelor's comfort. The house—a three-roomed shanty—was pitched midway between a gigantic willow, a dome-shaped mass of swaying foliage, with silvery sheen, and a "wonder-boon," possessing, like the many-stemmed baobab, more trunks than branches. Within the bewildering maze of stems Drury had swung a hammock, and here he occupied himself studying Dutch and consuming Boer tobacco.

When Smedley pressed him as to the object of his studies, he said he was learning the *taal* in order to make love in Dutch.

"You see," he said, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and swaying his hammock, "I mean to be a Dopper, wear veldschoens, a short round coat, wide pants, and a smasher as large as an umbrella, sing hymns through my nose before sunrise, and drink coffee between smokes all the afternoon."

Smedley was rather weary of this eternal frivolling on

his friend's part. He replied, with intentional irony, "That was scarcely the programme you mapped out when you left England."

Drury sat up with a more serious look than was usual with him. "I dare say you think I am weak-minded, Frank—perhaps I am. My philosophy may not be very deep or very noble; but it can define clearly enough the consequences of a false sacrifice. Let me say, at once, the sacrifice would not be on my side. Miss Elton never loved me; she was sweet and kind, but no more. You may frown, but allow me to say that you don't know what love means. She accepted me purely to please her father, who somehow, you remember, took a violent fancy for me. If I held her to her promise, I would be doing her an injustice. The first count of my case against duty is proved. I would not pretend that I am unselfish, and my happiness enters into the second count. You must have guessed that I am not lingering here out of mere idleness. How can I tell you what I owe to the kindness of Mrs. Beyers? Enough to say that I have been treated as a son by her—as a brother by Stoffel; while—" he hesitated a moment, then said firmly, "I love Miss Beyers, and know she loves me. There is my case. If I had sacrificed myself and others to duty, I may have derived a certain cold, lifeless satisfaction; but in sacrificing duty to self, I made two people happy, and give the possibilities of happiness to a known third and an unknown fourth. Sometimes it has occurred to me that you may be that fourth."

"What do you mean?" asked Smedley, whose mind had wandered away to the Devonshire rectory, with its sweet mistress.

"I mean, my friend, that it is reserved for you to win Miss Elton. Nay, don't start," he continued, with a gay smile, "I was jealous of you in Devonshire."

This conversation ended Drury's part in the business which brought them from England. His heart had not been in it from the start, and he was only too glad that Smedley should carry the task to its close and reap the entire crop of thanks and gratitude from Miss Elton. He, however, suggested that he and Stoffel should do what they could to secure a free pardon for the Fossicker, on the ground that he had acted in self-defence in shooting the messenger at Dead Man's Creek, and, with the intention of seeing the Transvaal authorities, they accompanied Smedley and Jessie as far as Pretoria.

Mrs. Beyers and Sannie saw the party off, three of them in a Cape cart, drawn by four mules, and Stoffel and Gert riding. The parting was not so sad as it might have been, for Sannie had extracted a promise from Jessie and Smedley, willingly enough made, that they would return next year.

A fortnight elapsed, when Smedley, with Jessie again under his protection, and Gert of course in attendance, drove over the long grey plains towards Kimberley. They watched the sun rise, a mighty arc of blood red over the low hills on the horizon, and were blinded by the broad level rays direct in their face; but as he mounted swiftly into the heavens, they could see freely over the desolate expanse that surrounds the Diamond City in a setting of a dull and sombre hue. As if conscious of the melancholy waste, the sun, with matchless colouring, diffused a beauty over the flats, deceptive as the beauty

painted on a faded cheek. He tinted the drifting mist with a rosy flush, gleamed with a silver lustre upon wagon tracks, touched with diamond-pointed beams the quivering drops of dew on belated blades of shrivelled grass, and greatest art of all—but most cruel in its mockery—pictured calm lakes of marvellous beauty, studded with leafy islands and bordered by shady trees. Nature does her best to cover up all ugliness: she hides the throat of an extinct volcano in a covering of green, clothes bare rocks, with many-hued lichen, brightens the gloomy mountains with snow, and, where she cannot call leafage and water to her aid, makes a pretence of beauty out of light and vapour. Mere human vanity and make-believe pales besides that stupendous fraud of nature, the mirage, which makes a lake out of a patch of land as dry as a fossil sponge, and as ugly as a discarded hearth-rug worn bare in patches.

Now the sun shone on the iron roofs of the town, and now they heard the muffled roar from the blasts in the mine, and saw a thin column of dust and smoke ascend.

The town was waking up as they drove in, companies of natives were trooping out of enclosed compounds, and with deep chantings, with loud chattering, and sportive antics, filed off to the mines under care of their silent and somewhat surly white conductors. These natives have a vast fund of good humour, and a boy's love of fun, in marked contrast to the earnest gravity of their European overseers. They have some good stuff in them, too, the stuff that brave men all the world over are made of—a marvellous endurance, and a spirit of self-sacrifice. Since the mine was opened, each year thousands of them have

walked from their kraals a thousand miles away to work in the great pit, and hundreds have died from disease and starvation on that long track. Hundreds more have lost their lives in the mine—for each foot sunk, a life probably has been sacrificed—yet they go to work as cheerfully as they would set out to a dance. In a recent fearful accident at De Beer's mine, when fires burst out in the underground workings, two natives received medals for their heroic attempts to save their companions. A white man, escaping from the tunnels, passed a party of native workmen seated on the ground, smoking calmly and chatting. "Why don't you run?" he exclaimed—"what are you doing here?" "We await death," was the composed response.

They drove on through soft sand which sent up stifling clouds of dust, passing little iron bungalows with shady verandahs and pretty gardens enclosed in a lattice work of reeds; meeting riding parties out for a morning gallop; overtaking heavy wagons with their slow-footed teams, and being in their turn overtaken by mule wagons and farmers' carts bound for the market. Bare-legged coolies, with large turbans and a cool breechless garment wrapped round the waist and drawn between the legs, trotted on to make their purchases of fruit or vegetables. Business men, with sleep still in their eyes, collarless, with felt hats crushed carelessly over uncombed locks, slouched in slippered ease to the market to buy a bunch of carrots for a shilling, or a load of wood for £40, to chat over the share gamble, to arrange for further deals, and to talk over the last great coup at *rouge-et-noir*. What Capel Court is, so is Kimberley—given up to bulling and bearing, to rigging and schem-

ing, to options and calls, to the wild exhilaration and fearful tumbles of share gambling; but the men of Kimberley are more like the 'Change bulls and bears of ten years ago. The brokers of Capel Court now pursue their calling with severe respectability—they have forgotten their jokes, and abandoned the jovial meeting in the bar, and the temptations of whisky, for the mild dissipation of coffee and the smiles of demure waitresses. Their Kimberley brothers are more boisterous, they cannot conclude a bargain without the aid of a long refresher; they love merriment, and they worship chance, whether it is involved in the fluctuations of the share market, or whether it depends on the turn up of "right bower," or in the probabilities of a good Nap hand. Their energy is undoubted—their sharpness unquestioned—their good fellowship a proverb; they are, as they will tell you, the hub of South Africa; but they don't know what to do with their dust, and they have given an uneviable reputation to three letters of the alphabet—I. D. B., which mean "Illicit Diamond Buyers," and refer to some of the most cunning and most unscrupulous rascals in creation.

A canopy of dust spread over the large open space in which the market was held, stirred up by the feet of hundreds of oxen, who, having drawn their heavy loads of wood or grain from long distances, now stood in patience, rattling their long horns occasionally against the yoke to dislodge flies, or lowing with a sort of moan for water. Their bodies were scarred and streaked with the marks of the terrible lash; their ribs, standing out prominently, told of insufficient food, and the hollows between the hip-bone and ribs showed that they had had no water. The ox in

South Africa is an ill-used and long-suffering beast of burden, who stands strongly in need of vigilant friends. His neck is rubbed bare by the yoke, he is prodded with the butt end of the bamboo whip, lashed with the long biting "foreslag," bruised with the pliant and heavy sjambok, kicked, sworn at, and reviled in bad Dutch and worse English. When it is necessary to stop the span, the leader, always black, always little, thin, ragged, and miserable, picks up the nearest missile, whether it be a brick, a pebble, or a rock, and hurls it promiscuously into the span, where it strikes with a loud crash upon some horn, causing the patient brute exquisite pain, as may be seen from the way it holds its head sideways and closes its eyes with lashes quivering. There are carriers, or "karrefeyers," as they are locally called—a Hottentot rendering, probably, of "conveyor"—who treat their oxen well according to their theory of good treatment to dumb beasts. That is, they fatten the oxen up before setting out on a long journey, and are careful about doing short "scoffs," or laps, between halts; but even they treat their cattle with unthinking cruelty, and work the toiling beasts until they cannot pull any longer, and have scarce strength to crawl from the roadway to die in the veld. There are few more pathetic sights in South Africa than the discarded ox, thinned to a skeleton, standing by the roadside, watching with dull eyes the wagon, he had helped to draw over hundreds of miles, slowly moving away, while the vultures are sweeping overhead in circles that bring them nearer to the worn-out and abandoned beast. The main roads may be traced by the bones and skeletons of oxen who have so perished, working at the

yoke up to the very last, with an endurance that should have won them protection years ago.

They paused awhile to watch the animated scenes in the crowded market, where produce of all kinds was put up to auction, then drove on to a large and rather handsome hotel in Main Street, having a solid brick front, sheltering verandah, and well-fitted spacious rooms.

Leaving Jessie comfortably settled, Smedley went off to see the mine, the biggest hole in creation, as he was informed by an individual drinking iced whiskey-squash through a straw, which he used, he confidentially observed, in order to make his morning eye-opener last the longer.

It was, indeed, a "big hole" he found in the centre of the town; a deep, wide, funnel-shaped pit, deep enough and wide enough to have swallowed Trafalgar Square, with the National Gallery thrown in, and the Hôtel Métropole on the top of that. For seventeen years thousands of men have been ceaselessly deepening that hole, working within a circle of shale set like a band about a mighty column of green, yellow, and blue soil, studded throughout with gems, already extracted by tons in weight, and to the value of some forty millions. From the bottom of the pit, underground burrowings stretch into greater depths, and still there is no fathoming this column of blue, and no end to the glittering stones. What great forces there must have been at work, when this natural funnel—leading, perhaps, to subterranean fires—was filled with molten clay, and shot through and through with star-like gems. The cooling mud has closed around the "stones," taking the impress of every angle and facet, and holding

its prizes with such jealous care that the miner has to call to his aid the disintegrating forces of air and water to loosen the grasp. Even then some rare gems have yet another shield in a covering of carbon, rough without like a pebble, but smooth as glass within. What a nut to crack, one of those dull pebbles—what a sudden blaze and dazzling play of coloured flame when the light strikes upon the satin smoothness of the long-hidden gem. Is it the beauty of high heaven that glows within the stone, or the fire of hell, sleeping for a thousand centuries, and now leaping forth to call into play within the eyes that gloat over it the devilish light of greed, ambition, of treachery, and theft?

Smedley watched the labourers descending into the mine, some of them in cars suspended by pulleys to iron cables, which stretched hundreds of feet in length to the bottom. The cars—with their human freight—plunged off lofty staging, and swept down over the long bend of the shining cable, with a lightning speed, and sense of danger about the terrific descent, that are only feebly reflected in the switchback, aerial flights, and toboggan slides of modern pleasure grounds. After spending some minutes at the edge of the mine, he slowly returned to the hotel, passing on his way many clerks and brokers on their way to banks, diamond offices, and numerous attractive shops. One of these, a dark-complexioned, showily-dressed man, who wore diamonds in profusion—diamond studs, a diamond pin, diamond rings, and a yellow diamond hanging from his watch-chain—turned and watched Smedley enter the hotel, then followed after to make close inquiries about recent arrivals. Half an

hour afterwards, this curious and much-bejewelled individual might have been seen in earnest conversation with a short, quiet-looking man, who wore earrings, and had a way of drooping his eyelids when talking to any one, so that one could only catch the gleam of his eyes through two narrow slits—a disconcerting habit, and one which gave him a perceptible advantage over the man whose eyes were wide open.

During the greater part of the day Smedley was in the offices of the *Kimberley Advertiser*, first looking through files of the paper, and then reading the evidence in the case of “Queen *versus* Henry,” accused of illicit diamond buying. He had, to his own satisfaction, identified Henry with convict No. 46, whom he saw in Capetown gaol, and the latter with Elton.

He rose from his long study of the case, looking troubled and worn. It appeared to him that the prosecution had proved its case up to the hilt, and he could not but silently admit that the jury had returned the only verdict possible in bringing in the prisoner guilty of illegally purchasing diamonds from a native. The only feature of the case which made it different from others of its class was the conduct of the prisoner. After emphatically declaring that the diamonds had been given to him to hold in trust by a woman, whose name he did not know, and whose description he would not give, he maintained an attitude, according to the report, of “scornful silence.” Against his statement was the evidence of a native who had received the diamonds from a detective, with instructions to offer them to the prisoner for a fraction of their value; the evidence of the detective who deposed to the discovery

of the diamonds on the prisoner's person, and the statement of a third man—probably the messenger killed by the Fossicker—who averred that he had watched the prisoner speaking with suspected persons, and had accordingly warned the police.

The Judge had pressed the prisoner to make a further statement, and the police were instructed to make inquiries into the characters of persons with whom he had been known to be in communication. Nothing, however, transpired, and there was only that bald statement that he had received the diamonds in trust. The Judge treated this as a cunning fabrication of a man who sought to gain sympathy by representing that he was shielding another.

There was yet a hope of clearing Elton's character, if his story should prove true, and Smedley, as he slowly walked home, made up his mind that Foster was the man who could corroborate the prisoner's defence. The question now was to find Foster, and at the thought, he stood still, and looked sharply around, half expecting to see his man.

What he did see was Gert, swaying to and fro before a canteen, as with drunken seriousness he was imparting some apparently valuable information to a quiet-looking stranger, who wore earrings.

"Gert," cried out Smedley, sharply, afraid lest the old man should get into trouble, "come with me."

"Halloa!" replied Gert, "who calls Gert so loudly? Oh!" as he saw his master, "it is myn goot baas, my ole frien'" He smiled vacuously, and doffed his smasher with a great bow, which overbalanced him. Solemnly raising himself, he dusted his pants with much dignity, and rolled

away after his master, saying as he went, "It is wot I tole you—plenty elephants' teeth, plenty gold-dust."

Late in the night, Smedley, who had been patrolling the busy streets, was attracted by the white but brilliant glare of the electric light in a large building, and finding this was the club, entered, in the hope of finding Foster there. Passing through the billiard-room, he entered a smaller room, opening on a verandah. A few men were at cards there, and in the hope that this would be the most attractive place for the man he was after, Smedley disposed himself in a Madeira chair, with a coolness that made some of the old *habitués*, who recognized in him a new-comer, elevate their eyebrows. However, that was a passing emotion, and as if apologizing for the inhospitality it portended, one of the men who was idly looking on took a seat near, offered Smedley a cigar, and began putting the visitor at his ease.

"New-comer?"

"Yes; I only arrived this morning."

"From below—not Sheol, you know, but Capetown; though there's not much choice between them, I understand?"

"Oh, no," replied Smedley, laughing, "I am from Pretoria."

"Ah! yes," observed the other, knowingly, "I know. You're a syndicate—been floating companies. I thought so. You look like a syndicate, as if you had the weight of the world on your back. They all do; but—ha, ha!—the weight falls upon the public. Poor old public! Well, you know," he continued, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets, and leaning back in his easy-chair,

“we know how to make money here, and, by Jove! sir, we know how to lose it—don’t we, Tom?” This last to a tall, red-faced man who was playing at cards, his adversary being a young fellow, looking flushed and excited.

“What’s that?”

“I was telling this gentleman we know how to make money and how to lose it.”

“Bedad! that’s so. Here, boy, another whisky, and don’t drown it.”

“That makes the fifteenth glass to-night,” observed the first man to Smedley, confidentially. “You see I’ve got a liver and cannot drink more than a paltry half-dozen glasses myself, so I count Tom’s share. He goes up to twenty, and then he thinks he has had his whack. He believes in moderation, does Tom. He has lost £2,000 already—he has, ’pon my soul—though he takes it so calmly.”

There was a slight commotion about the card-table, and Smedley’s friend excused himself for a moment.

“Beg pardon for leaving you,” he said, on returning, “but that game over there is very pretty—very pretty. Tom has lost £3,000, the whole of his balance at the Standard; and now, ’pon my soul, he has staked two buildings in Main Street which bring him in £1,000 a year rent. What do you think of that?”

“Rather reckless,” observed Smedley, scarcely knowing what reply to make.

“Oh, Tom was always that, but he does not look it. Thunder! he has taken his twenty-first glass—he must have lost. Excuse me—I really must hear about it.”

There was a commotion about the table. The successful

player, who held a cheque for £3,000, and a promise of title deeds which would give him an income of a thousand a year, was trembling with excitement, but the man they called Tom lit a cigar and made a joke.

Smedley felt a tap on his shoulder, and a boy in buttons handed him a perfumed note.

“Ah! you dog,” observed his former confidant, “an appointment already?”

“Well,” said Smedley, as he glanced over the note—a lady’s handwriting, bold and dashing—“you are right.” This is what he read:—

“Meet me to-morrow at the Grand Stand at 11 a.m. See that you are not followed. Burn this.”

CHAPTER XXX.

A PLOT REVEALED.

NEXT morning, Smedley made preparations for the departure of Jessie by the three o’clock train for Cape-town, and when Gert knew that his beloved young mistress was going on alone, he begged to be sent with her. It was well that his master consented, and took a ticket for the old man. This done, he hired a saddle-horse, and saying good-bye to Jessie, in case he should not return in time to see her off, rode out on the road towards the Dutoitspan mine. When he had got well out of the spreading town, he followed directions, and turned off over a bare unlovely flat to the right. He soon made out the race-course and the grand stand—a rather imposing erection.

It looked deserted, until he was within a few hundred

yards, when he saw a horse hitched to a pole. It was saddled, he soon noticed, for a lady; and while wondering who she was, and what the import of the interview could be, he saw the horsewoman herself on the grand stand.

He dismounted, threw the reins over a pole, and mounted the stairs to the top. The fair horsewoman rose as he approached, and they stood looking at each other in silence. Her figure was faultlessly clad in a tailor-made habit, which showed the sweeping lines of the bust to perfection. She held a jewelled whip in her gloved hand, and mechanically tapped the pointed toe of a small and neatly-booted foot fully exposed to the ankle by the lift of the robe. Her face, though now cold, and bearing signs of recent suffering or strong emotion, might be handsome—perhaps beautiful—when glowing with colour and good spirits. She was the first to break the silence.

“You do not pay me a compliment by not recognizing me. Yet I remember you well enough, Mr. Smedley—how is Drury?”

He recognized her before she spoke, and the memory of that night on the verandah at Capetown rushed on him.

“Why,” he said, warmly, “you do not suppose I could forget you, Miss de Beers?”

He caught her hand in a hearty grasp, and she saw plainly that he was pleased.

She smiled faintly and turned pale. “You do not look well,” he said, anxiously; “pray be seated on one of these benches.”

“I wish you were not so kind,” she murmured, “it will make it all the harder for me.”

He looked at her keenly then, and noted a whiteness and tension about her lips.

"Have you something to tell me?" he asked, gravely. She motioned him to sit.

"There," she said, "sit where I cannot meet your eyes." She pressed her lips and frowned as if at some displeasing thought.

"Ah!" thought Smedley, "poor girl, she has something unpleasant to tell me," and then it flashed through his mind that Miss de Beer had hinted in Capetown that she had a story to tell. He recalled the scene at the docks when she had fainted at the sight of the convict.

"Do you know why I brought you here? That I might gain courage from these surroundings, which are associated with my most pleasant memories. I have sat here," she continued, with a faint smile, "the centre of a gay throng—every one doing his utmost to please me. You must think that there is not much to sustain me in such memories, but if I could not remember that I had been admired, I would be crushed with shame under the revelation I must make. One thing I ask," she added, with a passionate ring in her voice, "is that you will not scoff me. Promise!"

He bowed his head. "Why say anything if it will be painful to you?"

"Thank you," she replied, wearily, "I have summoned courage to tell all, and you must not put me off, lest I be tempted again."

He said no more, fixing his eyes anywhere but on her troubled face, and listening to her story without showing any revulsion.

"You will think," she said, with a catch in her voice, "I am for ever making confessions. Perhaps if you will listen to my story, you may find some excuse for me when I tell you what is on my mind."

She looked wistfully at him, and he simply held out his hand to her as if in pledge.

"I am one of those," she began, in a low voice that now and again quivered with remorse or passion, "who thirst for admiration. My whole life has been a study to secure admiration, and the more I won the more I thirsted for, until it became a mania with me. I studied men, too—knew how to flatter them, and how to please them—but in acquiring a knowledge of their ways, I lost touch of modesty and womanly reserve. In proportion as the men liked me, the women hated me, so that I was thrown more into men's society, and I became a man's chum. It was then I found out that men do not love a woman who can smoke, and chaff, and play billiards, and call them by their Christian names. It was a bitter discovery; and I dressed more expensively, became more recklessly bold, and more determined to secure admiration. It was then that I fell in with Foster." She said the last words with a hissing noise, and her lips moved.

"Oh, he was a perfect villain!" she continued, "and he played upon my vanity with devilish success. He pretended to be an open-minded simpleton—he came to me for advice; told me of his business at Kimberley; of his hopes; gave me diamonds; flattered me; and eventually induced me to visit Kimberley. Once there, he began to secure me in his toils. How patiently he worked at them; how he sapped at my ideas of right; showed me

off; got me admired; and mixed me up with a crowd of wealthy men, who lived well, but who were nevertheless rascals, every man of them. They began to call me I. D. B., and I laughed with them at the nickname, poor, silly fool that I was!" She pressed her hands together, and a few hot tears ran down her cheeks.

"That was not the end of his plans. They used to give me diamonds—rough stones—and one day a detective waited on me. Good heavens! I shall never forget the horror that took possession of me when he told me that he would arrest me for illicit diamond buying. I expostulated, stormed, and cried. He was immovable. He said I had long been suspected; then he searched my room and found the stones that had been given me." She paused to regain her composure.

"It was a master-stroke of cunning," she continued, with a mirthless laugh. "Foster came in when I had thrown myself in despair upon the couch. He listened to what the detective had to say, then, with a reassuring smile—the unutterable villain!—he led the detective out of the room. How he squared him I never learnt, or cared to learn; but when Foster explained that I had nothing more to fear, I was perfectly frantic in my gratitude. What a waste of thanks that was. I hope I don't tire you?" she said, turning to Smedley.

He made a gesture for her to continue.

"A week passed, and I was again in the full swing of gaiety, when one morning Foster placed a packet in my hand, and a railway ticket to Capetown. He said I was to leave that day and take the parcel, which contained diamonds, to England.

"I refused disdainfully.

"He reminded me of the service he had done me, and in fear I consented. Twice he sent me off on a mission of this kind, and three times to Salt River, near Capetown, but he never showed his hand, and I did not suspect he was using me as a tool.

"One day—one fearful day—I realized my position. I had met young Mr. Elton—you may well start—for now I am coming to that which affects you." She paused, growing deadly pale.

"You see," she explained, with a smile that made Smedley shudder, it was so ghastly, "I have not lost all shame." She struggled again to suppress her emotion.

"Elton liked to talk to me, and I felt an interest in him. Foster was keen enough to see how friendly we were, and induced me to make Elton take charge of a few diamonds. He urged me to represent that they were mine, and I heedlessly undertook the task."

Smedley made an exclamation of horror.

She clasped her hands, and said appealingly, "Do not judge me too harshly. I suspected absolutely nothing; and next day that cunning, wicked man sent me away, using something like a threat. I heard nothing of Elton until I returned, and then I was overwhelmed by the news that he had been convicted of illicit dealing in diamonds. I went straight to Foster and demanded an explanation. He laughed at me, and when I announced my intention to inform the police, he threatened to have me charged with illicit diamond buying. He pictured the horrors of my degradation, and mockingly told me that I could exercise my powers of fascination upon the convicts during

my term of imprisonment. Oh, the wretch—the unutterable wretch!” She got up and walked quickly up and down.

“What could I do—what could I do?” she asked, with a wild, heart-breaking cry. “The dread of imprisonment, to me, who shrank from suffering and discomfort, the shame of exposure to one who thirsted for respect, overweighed my better feeling. I surrendered, and ever since the evil influence of that man has been exercised. God knows what I have suffered, and this is a part of my punishment.”

There was a step upon the stairs, and a man moved stealthily up, but they neither of them noticed it.

“I have not told you all yet,” she said, as Smedley rose. “Last night he came to me with another proposition. He told me you had arrived, bearing the secret of a hidden treasure. He bade me entrap you into taking diamonds from me, and then he meant to use the threat of procedure against you for I.D.B. to force the secret from you. I told him I would do his bidding—for once,” she said, with a hard smile, “he has found that I am his match.”

“I have told you all,” she said, raising her voice under the stress of the mingled feelings of shame and anger and disgust which nearly overmastered her. “Elton is innocent of the crime charged against him. You must clear his name, and bring that man to justice. I will give evidence,” she added, “if necessary, but if you can spare me do so. Now,” she said, looking at him half in dread, yet with a touch of pride, “you can condemn me—or not.”

Smedley did neither. He saw nothing but a fine and noble nature wasted for want of direction.

"Poor girl!" he said, taking her hand. "Who am I that I should condemn you? You can restore Elton his character and regain your self-respect at the same time."

"Ah!" she added, with a burst of tears at his sympathy, "but I cannot restore him his lost five years."

"He has indeed suffered a fearful injury; but you must do what you can to repair it," he said, gently. "This day that lady he will marry is leaving for Cape-town. I will tell her that he is freed from all blame, and this afternoon I will find out Foster. I think I can force a confession from him that may spare you."

"Ah! Mr. Smedley, you are a good man. Leave me now, I must think of my future action." He bowed to her gravely, but as he turned she impulsively caught his hand and kissed it, while hot tears fell upon it. "If you had scorned me," she went on, "I would have hardened my heart with pride. Now I can shake this life off." There was a beautiful smile on her lips, and a glory in her eyes, as she looked up to the skies.

A report—sharp and startling—rang out. She threw up her arms and fell with a moan. Smedley lifted her and placed her on the bench, then sprang to the parapet. Already the assassin had mounted one of the horses, and was driving the other before him as he galloped madly towards Kimberley.

A gasp from the unfortunate girl brought Smedley to her side. A tiny stream of blood was oozing from a small

hole in her breast, a deadly paleness was on her face, and her long lashes quivered over eyes that were rapidly filming over.

"I am dying," she murmured, "dying. Oh! my Father—pardon—forgive your child!" Her eyes opened and fixed themselves on Smedley, down whose face the tears freely rolled. Her eyes roamed over his face and fixed upon his with a vacant stare that thrilled him with sorrow, so that he could not repress a sob. The sound seemed to stir her to consciousness. The film left her eyes, and a wonderful light came into them.

"You cry—for me!" she gasped. "Ah! it is sweet to see your tears. I fear not now. Your tears give me courage to die. You remember—on the verandah—that night—you kissed me." Her eyes opened and were fixed on his.

With the tears in his eyes, he bent his head and touched her lips.

"Ah!" she sighed, then her eyes opened wide. "There is pity—wonderful pity—and forgiveness." Her voice grew low, and her eyes looked away into the sky. Her lips moved—he bent his head to listen. She was repeating a prayer, such as children repeat at their mother's knee—then, with a sigh of content and a radiant smile, her head fell back upon his arm, and he laid her reverently down.

Amid the deserted surroundings of her former triumphs, her spirit—purified in the last great effort of her better nature—passed away. With head uncovered, Smedley turned his white face to the heavens, as if to follow the flight upwards.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A CONFESSION.

SMEDLEY was filled with horror at the terrible tragedy he had witnessed, but that feeling was succeeded by a desire to track the murderer.

In his heart he knew that Foster had committed the crime, and he had no doubt about overtaking the villain before night. It was impossible that he could escape if the police were put on the track at once. He looked around; there was no one in sight; and he started off at once for the Dutoitspan Road, where he hailed a passing cab. After giving the driver instructions to pick up the first policeman he could find and drive back to the Grand Stand, he pencilled a note to be sent on to the police quarter. In that he hurriedly described the murder, and advised that the detectives should be placed at once upon the track of Foster. The cabman drove off at break-neck speed, scenting something serious in the air from the pale face and suppressed excitement in the bearing of Smedley. His curiosity tempted him to read the note, and by the time he had reached Kimberley, he had shouted the news to brother Jehus. With swiftness almost of an electric flash the news spread from camp to camp. It reached the station as the train was starting—the whistle of the engine sounded like a shrill cry of horror—a scream that summed up and expressed the gasp of woe which broke from thousands of pale lips. A late passenger, who could not stop even for his change, grew white as

he heard the words "murder" and "Grand Stand"; and the faces at the windows of the long train blanched as they too heard a whisper of the crime. Some thrust their heads and shoulders out, asking, "What is it?" One young lady, seeing the scared look on the face of the belated passenger, cried out and swooned away. A dark, wizened face appeared at the door of a compartment in the rear of the train set apart for coloured people, and the almost black skin turned a greyish tint as this passenger, too, saw the hurrying man swing himself on to the steps of a saloon carriage.

There was consternation in the busy mining town, and then a string of pedestrians, horsemen, and vehicles swept out over the dreary flat for the race-course. When Smedley retraced his steps he was not alone. He heard the shouting in the distance, as cabmen threw the fearful item to each other, and caught the rattle of wheels, and the thunder of the train.

He waited for the train to come by, hoping to get some comfort from the sight of Jessie's sweet face. He glanced up eagerly at the windows that seemed to run into one long line of gleaming glass as the train swept by, and from the horror-struck and excited faces that flashed out upon him, he saw that they knew of it already. His eyes moved swiftly from face to face—then they rested upon one man who stood alone on the small railed platform at the end of a sleeping-car. It was Foster. The recognition was mutual, and in that swift glance from the black eyes there was a gleam of devilish triumph.

Smedley staggered as if he had been struck. Then he

ran madly after the train, gesticulating, but the guard looked back at him with a pitying smile.

“Merciful Heavens!” he groaned, “does he know Jessie is there? If so, God help her, for I cannot.” He looked after the train in a sort of stupor. He saw some one lean out from a carriage, wave something white, and then drop it. The rush of wind caught this up, twisted it round and round, sucked it in among the wheels, then shot it out again, when it floated away and settled on the grass. He picked it up, and dropped it as though it had been some poisonous thing when he read it. He stood looking down at it with deep lines between his eyes, then he picked it up again and read it over and over, until every word seemed to burn itself into his brain. The writing, zig-zagged over a piece of paper torn from a letter, and was in pencil. It ran:—

“DEAR OLD BOY,—Don’t be distressed. Jessie is in safe keeping. I have made up my mind to retire from these scenes, and will take her with me. Don’t trouble about wiring to have the train stopped. My friends have cut the wires. You see I prepared for this trip. Ta, ta! Sorry I cannot take a more extended farewell.”

He smoothed the paper out and folded it. There was writing on the other side—the fragment of a letter in a woman’s hand. He read slowly:—“confess all.
I will not . your wicked plans. By the time this reaches you all will be exposed. Elton, whom
you falsely and wickedly accused through other persons will at any rate be freed from all stain, and appear before the world as a noble man who held his peace and suffered the

ignominy rather than betray, as he supposed, a friendless woman. God pardon me for my share in this foul treachery.—Signed, IDA DE BEER.”

Here was a priceless confession, indeed ; but of what use now in the light of the devilish hint shadowed in the hastily written lines on the reverse side. There was a hideous irony in the juxtaposition of the confession which freed Elton’s character and placed happiness within his reach, and the threat which made the confession worthless, and destroyed the spark of hope just as it appeared.

Action in an emergency of this kind was a necessity and a relief. Smedley forgot that his presence was needed at the race course, where now a great and hushed crowd filled the ring. The last catastrophe had blotted the first from his memory, and he was hurrying to Kimberley, intent upon some scheme for overtaking Foster, when a hand was placed on his shoulder.

“Are you Mr. Smedley ? ”

“I am,” replied Smedley, turning round and facing a tall, grave-looking man.

“I must detain you in connection with this murder.”

Smedley looked at the man without catching the drift of his words, his mind being filled with one idea—how to save Jessie.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, “what is it ? ”

The man looked at Frank rather keenly before replying. “I believe you were the only one present at the murder of Miss de Beer ? ”

“You forget the murderer,” said Smedley, sharply.

“No, sir ; I do not. And a very strict account will have to be given by you before we believe there was any one else present.”

“Good Heavens! man; do you suspect me. Read that,” he said, holding out the scrap of paper; “the murderer wrote that. He is in that train, and if you knew your duty, you would put a special engine on the track after him in half an hour.”

The man read the note deliberately, then turned it over and read the other side.

“I do not see what this has to do with it,” he replied. “And you had better come with me at once.” He called up a cab that was waiting a few yards off, and, with a bitter smile, Smedley stepped in. He felt indeed that the fates were against him.

CHAPTER XXXII.

OVER THE BRIDGE.

BOTH Jessie and Gert had seen Foster get out of the train just as it was leaving the station, and the former, in distress at the memories which his appearance recalled, swooned away. She was alone in the compartment of a Hutchinson sleeping-car, set apart for ladies, and had been left to recover as best she could—the coloured attendant being too busily engaged elsewhere discussing the rumoured murder.

When finally she recovered consciousness and looked around, the train was well on its way to Hopetown on the Orange River. She was in a comfortably-fitted cabin, with cushioned seats arranged on three sides of a movable table, and with fixtures for the sleeping-berths. This cabin or stall was separated from another vacant one opposite by a carpeted passage running down the length

of the car. The compartment was separated from the larger section reserved for men by a sliding door. At the end of the car was a lavatory opening out on to a railed platform.

It took her some time to note these particulars, for her head felt bewildered, and then she could not help listening with beating heart to every step beyond the closed door. When at last the door was swung back she shrank into a corner. To her relief it was not Foster.

"Well, missy," said the new-comer, with a flourish of a napkin not too white; "you like tea? All ready now."

"You are the waiter," exclaimed Jessie, much relieved. "Are there no other ladies in the train?"

"Mebbe some in other part of train, but none of 'em on board my saloon," he replied, with great dignity. "Have nice chop—fraish aig—toast—coffee—tea? No whisky, no beer, 'cept the lady have brought with her."

Jessie observed that a cup of tea would be sufficient.

"Very good, lady. I bring at once—immejutly—direckly—with one—two—tree aig?"

"One egg will do, thank you."

"Thank *you*, Miss Lady." With another flick of the napkin, the polite waiter disappeared through the door, leaving it half closed. Glancing after him, she saw him pause in answer to a call from some passenger who put one or two questions.

"The lady is alone by herself," she heard the waiter reply, indicating that she was referred to by jerking his thumb in her direction. Before she could draw back, the passenger himself stooped forward and looked at her through the opening. It was Foster, and he smiled at her—

showing his white teeth, with an expression of cruel delight in his eyes, that one might look for in a wolf when it sees the lamb within its reach.

When the waiter returned, he found her paler than she was before.

"The lady must eat. See, here is a glass of wine the gentleman in there send you with compliments." He placed the glass on the table, but Jessie recoiled from it in horror.

"Take it away at once."

"Cert'nly ; mebbe the lady would like a leetle brandy—he have got some."

"I will speak to the guard if you say another word to that man about me."

"Oh, he was not the lady's friend then ?"

"Certainly not."

"Oh !" He looked at her flushed face gravely, then withdrew with the wine. She heard him talking, and her ear detected his quick change from complaint to protest, and then to consent—his acquiescence in what was said to him being connected with a bribe, from the chink of money. Instinctively she suspected that Foster was winning the man over.

When he next appeared she detected signs of uneasiness, but he did not speak further. He put up the sleeping-berth, ascertained that she required nothing more, then loudly slid the door across and locked it, taking the key with him.

Jessie was now left to herself, and her position was full of terror. She dared not climb into her bunk, but sat with her hands in her lap, and a hunted look in her

deep, large eyes. She tried to reason herself into the belief that she was perfectly safe in that locked compartment, but whenever she grew calmer a movement in the next compartment would awaken her terrors. At last she could bear the suspense no longer. The air in the cabin appeared to weigh upon her, and her eyes grew weary of staring at the yellow flickering flame in the gas-lamp overhead—she got up and walked softly out through the lavatory on to the railed platform, closing the door noiselessly behind her.

The night had already fallen. There was a faint glow in the south still, but from the other quarter a dense mass of inky-black clouds was climbing up into the heavens. Holding on to the rails, for the swaying of the car shook her, Jessie watched the stars disappearing slowly beneath the heavy roll of the clouds. The rush of the train made a wind that lifted her hair, but its touch was warm—almost hot—and dry. The roar and rattle of the train sounded to her wonderfully loud, but she felt that, beyond that noise, the stillness of death filled the void between earth and cloud. Often before she had witnessed the approach of a storm—had been oppressed by the fearful stillness which proceeds the earth-shaking thunder-clap, and had been awed by the fury of the elements. Now there was something in the dark scene that soothed her. She forgot her fears of Foster, and her whole soul was absorbed in the grandeur of the coming tempest.

A sharp gust of wind swept over the train, and following it came a few heavy drops. Jessie leant forward, listening intently for the rush of wind which heralded the storm. Presently, between the clatter of the wheels,

she heard a hollow moaning in the air, and looking up she saw a few light clouds torn into shreds. A flock of plover flew overhead, their wild cry sounding plaintively, and after them with labouring wings toiled a string of crane, their presence marked by the harsh cry, "kor k, konk." They were flying before the storm. The moaning overhead rose to a shrill scream, and then with a roar the wind dashed against the train. For a moment the engine seemed to be held powerless by the mighty pressure of the invisible foe. Then, with a sob and gasp, it struggled on, its speed perceptibly decreased. The hot wind, charged with fine sand, rattled against the windows and howled under the carriages.

Jessie, almost blinded, was blown against the rail, where she was held firmly by the pressure of the air, and she gasped painfully for breath, which seemed to be snatched from her mouth and forced from her lungs. This wind, however, was but the immediate herald of the storm gathering overhead, and it abated as quickly as it had arisen. She stood away from the rail, drinking in the cool air which followed upon the sand-storm, when a flash of lightning leapt earthwards, and a terrific clap of thunder nearly deafened her. A few moments of intense silence, and then the heavens were again illumined. The dark masses—cloud piled upon cloud—hung dangerously low, and the thunder shook the earth. Peal after peal began in angry murmurs, reached the full majestic volume, and then died away in reverberations far away. The lightning played incessantly, and at one time she saw two balls of fire shoot along the rails before the engine. Then the rain fell, accompanied by hail-stones of great size. In

a few moments the plains on either side the train were one sheet of water, punctured with myriad gleaming points where the hail struck, and visible for a second under the vivid flashing. The hail rebounded from the roof of the train, doing little damage, but along the right side the windows were completely smashed.

When the train approached the Orange River and passed beyond the limit of the storm, its appearance was forlorn in the extreme. The guard drew up on the great bridge spanning the river to ascertain if any of the passengers were injured.

The door leading into Jessie's compartment was unlocked, and, hearing the waiter calling for her in a startled voice, she entered. After satisfying himself that she was all right, he went out, and Foster entered the room, closing the door after him.

"Excuse my entering," he said, with a mocking smile; "but I knew your modesty would forbid me entrance if I had made the request, so you see," he said, shrugging his shoulders, "here I am."

"How dare you?" panted Jessie, shrinking from him.

"I dare much, young lady; as you will presently discover." He looked at her steadily up and down, then coolly locked the door. "You will do nicely. I am going off on a trip into the country, and you will make an admirable companion."

Jessie looked at the man horror-struck, the power of speech completely gone. By a great effort of will she moved her limbs and moved slowly towards the platform.

"That is right," he laughed; "lead the way." Then suddenly, with a fierce oath, he threw off all disguise,

caught her up in his arms, kissed her on her parted lips, and hurried out on to the platform at the end of the car. What he had intended doing was known only to himself. Apparently he meant to take advantage of the stoppage of the train to escape under cover of the darkness and confusion. He, at any rate, tried to descend to the roadway, but Jessie, uttering one despairing cry for Gert, caught hold of the iron railing and held on with frantic energy. Thus impeded in his movements, Foster lost his foothold and slipped. Letting go his hold, he rolled on to the line, recovered his feet, and was returning to Jessie, when fortunately the train moved on. He saw at once that his position was dangerous, and to escape the footboard he clambered up on to the parapet of the bridge.

Just as he accomplished this he saw a dark figure spring from the train, and towards the side of the bridge. The next moment this person was also on the parapet.

The two men were within a few feet of one another, but it was impossible in the darkness for Foster to distinguish the new-comer. The train swept out and left them both standing on that perilous foothold. On one side deep below was the river. Foster could hear the swollen waters dashing against the stone buttresses, and a fearful glance down into the dark abyss revealed streaks of gleaming white, where the flood fretted against the rocks. On the other side was the rail track. Coming towards him in a half-crouching figure was the dark, unknown form.

"Who are you?" muttered Foster, hoarsely. There was no reply, and in a spasm of terror he was about to spring down into the roadway, when, with a swift movement, the other grasped him round the waist.

"Let me go, blast you!" screamed Foster; "we will fall into the water."

"Duivel!" hissed his assailant, "I am Gert."

Foster gave a sort of moan of terror, then he struggled to free himself. He grasped the old man by the throat, and tried to hurl himself and his assailant into the road, but the old man with his bare feet firmly grasped the slippery iron. The bodies swayed fearfully, sometimes right over the dark flood. Foster released his hold.

"Let me go," he panted, "and you can have a thousand pounds!"

"I am Gert," the other replied, "and you stole my little girl!"

By a superhuman effort Foster thrust Gert away from him, and pushed him over. As the old man fell he twisted his leg round the other's ankle and jerked him off. With an awful shriek Foster fell backward. His head struck against the ironwork, and with a splash the body fell into the river. Gert, in the second he was suspended head downward with his foot round his enemy's leg, grasped an iron bar with his hand. When Foster fell, he himself hung suspended a moment, then dropped too, falling clear into the rushing waters.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

JOY IN THE MORNING.

SMEDLEY was detained for two days, when the police, by their slow and systematic inquiries, ascertained that his account was beyond suspicion, and they released him.

They found that the wires had been cut, and two witnesses volunteered the statement that they had seen a man answering to Foster's appearance ride hurriedly into the camp on the horse hired by Smedley. A telegram was put into his hands as he left the police-station. To his intense relief he saw it was from Jessie. It ran as follows: "Curington's Hotel, Capetown—"Why do you not come? Gert is missing. In anxiety.—JESSIE."

Within an hour he was on his way to her.

When the train slowed up under the large arch of the Alderley Street Station in Capetown, Smedley saw among the crowd waiting on the station the small, graceful form of Jessie. There was a gleam of the old, wandering look in her eyes that frightened him, and her face was pale. When she saw his tall, square form elbowing his way to her, she clasped her hands, and a rare smile of welcome lit up her face.

"Oh," she said, with a sob, "I am so glad!" She placed her hand upon his arm and crept up to his side with a sigh of relief that told Smedley more eloquently than words how her loneliness had affected her.

"I will not leave you again, my little sister," he said, tenderly, "until I can hand you over into the care of some one who has a better claim upon you."

A soft blush stole into her cheeks, and she looked up at him with her lips parted and a question in the depths of her eyes.

"All is coming right," he answered to the mute appeal. "Difficulties are smoothing out. In a few days Elton will recover his good name—and something even more valuable."

She pressed his arm. "Not more valuable, my brother.

A good name is dearer than life. Oh, how he must have suffered, and the shadow of that mountain has weighed upon my heart! I felt that it was creeping into my brain."

They had passed out of the station, and the great grey mass loomed up before them.

"Look, Jessie," he said, "there is a glory on the mountain."

She looked up and saw the white cloud covering the scars and fissures on the level top. A blaze of sunlight fell upon the cloud, suffusing the wreathing mist with a dazzling whiteness.

"Beautiful!" she murmured.

"Take it as a sign, little one, that the wounds of the past are to be lost and forgotten in a future of happiness."

"Ah, yes!" she said. Then she turned her glowing eyes upon him. "But I would not forget the past since it gave me such a brother."

"Thank you," said he, simply. But the memory of that look lived with him.

In the evening they sat on the verandah, and he talked to her again of the home in Devonshire, of Elton's white-haired father, and his sister, with her wonderful fortitude and patience.

"Then, when we have seen them, we will go back to my father; for he, too, is waiting. And there is Gert—we must find him."

"Ah!" said Smedley; "what has become of him?" He had not forgotten the old man, but was afraid to speak of him, lest he should have to refer to Foster, and he did not know how his name might affect her.

She told, however, what she knew of Foster's disappearance.

Once again Frank Smedley found himself within the gloomy interior of the Capetown goal, waiting for convict No. 46. On the first occasion he had sought for information from the convict, now he came with news. He smiled as he heard the slow and heavy steps approaching, and thought how his news would quicken the pulses deadened by years of degrading confinement. The door opened and the convict stepped in. He seemed to have aged since Smedley last saw him. His face was thinner, the lines about his mouth deeper, and the hair on his temple turning grey. The whole face, with its square mask, bore the impress of suffering, and Smedley felt a thrill of generous admiration for a man who had sacrificed his hopes and the best part of his life to screen a woman.

"You remember me?"

"I have not many visitors," replied the other, with a grim smile.

"No, I suppose not. I asked you if you could tell me anything of Mr. Elton, and"—

"I told you he was dead," said the convict, knitting his brows.

"You were mistaken," said Smedley, slowly, "he is alive. He was tried at Kimberley"—

"Stop, sir," said the convict, sternly. "If by some chance you have tracked that unfortunate man down, he would tell you that he is dead to the world, and that you have no right to disclose his identity, even to himself. The topic is unpleasant to me. You asked me when you were

here before to direct you to the Fossicker"— He paused, struggling with a deep emotion, and then, by an effort steadying his voice, continued, "Can you tell me anything of him?"

Smedley longed to blurt everything out, but restrained himself.

"Pardon me," he resumed, gravely, "for going against your wishes; but if you will listen for a minute you will see the importance of my news. Elton was tried at Kimberley on the charge of illicit diamond buying. He was condemned and sentenced. The evidence I have discovered was perjured, and the sentence a terrible injustice."

The convict drew his tall form erect involuntarily, and a strange look flashed over his worn face.

"Yes, sir," continued Smedley, with a quiver in his voice, "he was villainously trapped. The woman who was the means, and I believe the innocent means, of his imprisonment has confessed the whole shameful conspiracy."

"At last!" he murmured, turning his eyes to the barred window with a look of intense longing for the free air without.

"See!" continued Smedley, striving to fulfil his task without emotion, "here is a Government document admitting his innocence and granting his immediate release."

The convict took the document and read it through to the last words, "Mr Elton leaves the prison without a stain on his character."

"Without a stain!" he repeated, while he tore the sheet

into pieces. "Do they think that five years of this life leaves no stain? God help the men who condemn the innocent to the lingering agony of a prison life! Five years—without news of father and sister; without a word about the girl who is dearer to me than life; five years of mental torture, and at the end of it all 'leaves without a stain'! What a recompense!"

Smedley had scarcely expected this. He expected to have his news received with joy rather than bitterness, but he now saw the fearful irony which gave a man back his character when the penalty had been paid to the utmost.

"Mr. Elton," he said, quietly, addressing the other by his name, "you have indeed suffered much; but there are others who have suffered with you. The unfortunate girl, Miss De Beer, gave up her life in proving your innocence. Your father and your sister, on whose behalf I made the search for you, are every day expecting your arrival."

"Selfish fool that I am," murmured Elton, "to have thought only of myself! God forgive me. I had thought only of hiding myself from my friends. You do well to remind me of my duty to comfort them."

"Your father, for the last time, within a month from this will look from his window for you. The time is nearly up."

"A month!" he bowed his head and fell into a deep reverie. "Ah!" he sighed, "I must go to my father. Wait, Jessie, it is but a few months longer."

Smedley held his peace; he had a little plot of his own out the wistful look in the gaunt face before him nearly

drew forth his secret. He had brought a complete outfit with him, and in a few minutes Elton and himself were whirling off in a cab to the hotel. Elton was very quiet, and Smedley ordered him out into the garden. He obeyed with a gravity that had something pathetic in it, his obedience showing how even his masterful spirit had been subdued. In the garden he wandered up and down aimlessly, inhaling the air in gasps, and looking long at the flowers as upon some new wonder. Smedley, watching from the window, saw another figure, small and graceful, on the other side of the garden, hidden by a spreading fir. She had a violin with her, and presently she placed it against her shoulder and began to play. Smedley knew that she would soon fall into the one air that would be known to Elton, and he watched the latter eagerly.

At the first strains Elton looked about him, and made a few steps in the direction of the tree. But he suddenly checked himself and turned away, with a look of dejection in his whole attitude. It was evident the sounds of the instrument had recalled Jessie to his mind.

What was that which suddenly fixed him in an attitude of breathless suspense, as though he were carved in marble? Clear and sweet the voice rang out—

“The Bells of Shandon,
They sound so grand on
The pleasant waters of the River Lee.”

Elton turned and walked rapidly towards the unseen musician. Before he was in view she had detected his step, and stood leaning forward. Her arms opened, she moved

a step forward, and then—ah! then a mist came into Smedley's eyes, and he could see nothing, but heard the passionate cry breaking from those two faithful hearts.

They presently sought him out. "Oh, my brother," said Jessie, "the glory has come indeed!"

He was a terrible fellow, was Smedley, in love affairs, when he himself was not a principal. He worried them into a church, and saw them on board the homeward-bound steamer before the end of the week as man and wife.

"Won't you come with us?" said Elton, as he held Smedley's hand; "our home-going will be incomplete without you."

"Thank you," replied Smedley, with a sad smile, "but my work is not yet done. Think of the Fossicker away in that forest—when I have brought him out my occupation will be gone."

"Not gone; just beginning," whispered Jessie. "You will have a friend at court, and your reward will come. Stoop down."

He did so; she took his face within her hands and kissed his forehead. "You great, simple, noble-hearted man, have courage. Grace will adore you before I have told her half my story."

Husband and wife, in the beauty of their happiness after five long years of suffering, felt yet a keen touch of sorrow for the lonely figure who watched them from the pier head until the steamer was lost to sight.

Again Smedley set his face to the north, his self-imposed task nearly done. Once more he was in sight of Mrs. Beyers' peaceful homestead, and as he slowly rode on he

thought of the occasion when he had first seen it. Gert was with him then—faithful Gert. Where was he now? He raised his eyes and looked along the winding road. Far ahead of him was a solitary figure, toiling slowly on. As he rode up, he saw that the man was wearied out, dragging one foot after the other, while his head drooped forward. It was Gert—ragged, footsore, and starving. He did not look up at the horseman, and it was not until his master laid his hand upon his shoulder that he seemed to be aware of another's presence. Then the old man in his joy tried to laugh, but his weakness turned it into crying.

Smedley caught him up and sat him in the saddle, where the old fellow did nothing but protest against the sinfulness of his riding while his master walked, until they reached the house.

Here everything was still—the doors locked, and the house empty. After a time they succeeded in rousing an old coloured woman, who explained that the family were away at the wedding of Miss Sannie with the mooie Englander. She gave them food, however, and under her liberal diet Gert rapidly recovered. He stoutly declared he was strong enough to accompany his master into the forest; besides, he said, without him to lead the way his master would never reach the secret kloof.

Leaving a message for his friends, Smedley set out on the following day, taking another horse for Gert.

At the edge of the forest they turned their horses loose and entered. We will not follow them in their slow progress through the dense woods.

Once again they swam through the narrow portal leading into the mysterious kloof. An intense silence filled the vast arena, and communicated an uneasy feeling even to Smedley.

Gert shook as with the ague. "Baas," he said, gravely, "es sick in the heart. There is a black darkness creeping upon me. Will the sieur take me by the hand?"

Smedley restrained the light word of reproof that rose to his lips, and caught the old man's thin hand. There was something in the startled look which Gert threw around that chilled him. He walked on, leading his companion, until they reached the open space. He paused and listened. There was no sound.

"It is the spirit of death," whispered Gert; "I feel it."

Smedley felt his heart grow cold within him; then he nerved himself.

"It is only fear," he muttered. "Come, Gert, all will be right."

They reached the stone hut, and then Smedley saw that the face of the krantz, where the workings were, had fallen in. A huge mass of tumbled *débris* lay at the base of the precipice. He started forward with a cry, when a low exclamation from Gert drew his attention to the hut.

There, with his back to the wall, and a peaceful smile still hovering about his mouth, was the Fossicker—asleep. In his left hand he held his daughter's violin, while the other grasped the bow. The strings of the fiddle were broken.

"He is asleep," whispered Smedley.

"Yah, sieur," said Gert, solemnly; "it is the sleep of the dead."

Ay, so it was. The Fossicker was sleeping the long sleep. His arms were thin, and his form shrunken. He had pined away in the awful loneliness of the place, but the smile on his lips told that he had faced death with hope. He could have been dead but a few hours, and Smedley blamed himself for not having hurried. But what message could he have been trusted with that was not plain to him? The position of the fiddle told a tale of wonderful pathos. He could fancy the dying man, with his eyes fixed upon the heavens, playing some simple tune that his beloved daughter had taught him. The vast cliffs above had echoed the sweet strains until, with the breaking of the strings, the grandly simple heart of the player had stilled its beatings.

"Sieur," said Gert, in a voice so thrilling that Smedley started, as he stood with bared head in the presence of the noble dead—"Sieur," repeated the old man, placing a finger upon his lip, "hark!"

"What is it, Gert?" said Smedley, gently.

"It is the young Missy. I hear the music in the air that comes without a voice." He moved his head as if listening.

"There," he said, looking up, while his trembling figure, becoming suddenly old, swayed to and fro. "It is going higher and higher; getting softer and softer." He looked up with an eager, expectant light in his eyes. "Ah!" he exclaimed, mournfully, "it haf gone. Und the darkness comes creeping, creeping, creeping back,

like a big snake. Ah!" he cried, fiercely, "it is creeping to little Missy. Away! Ah! I have got him." He set his teeth, and his hands fought with the air. Then he gave a sudden movement forward, and craned his neck as though he were looking down into some abyss.

"There!" he exclaimed, drawing in his breath, "he has gone—gone! Oh!" he continued, with a frightened tone, "the water carries me away. Missy—master—save—help me!" Smedley seized a hand that was held despairingly up, and steadied the old man's head upon his arm. Presently the small, staring black eyes fixed themselves upon his face, and a flood of tears poured from them.

"Sieur, you was a good master to poor ole Gert. I would like take you safe trou the forest; but the shadow is come. I feel it fife days ago; but I hope all the time perhaps I can stay long enough show you the way out of woods. Can't be. The good Spirit leetle Missy tole me about will lead the baas, for he was a good master to ole Gert."

The old man paused, while Smedley could not keep back the moisture from his eyes.

"Sieur," he said, feebly, "there is one leetle thing I want you to do." He tried to unbutton his coat. Smedley did it for him, and the old man touched a little brass ring strung upon a thread. "That ring—it was my leetle girl's. Baas promise give it leetle Missy from ole Gert?"

Smedley bowed his head.

"Good-hye—sieur—you—was—a good—master." The

old head fell back, and Smedley laid the dead form upon the ground.

He toiled all through the day with his hunting-knife, digging two holes beneath a spreading yellow-wood. There he buried the white man and the black—the Christian and the heathen. The broken fiddle and bow he placed above the heart of the Fossicker, for he felt that Jessie would like this, and he took the poor little ring from its resting-place. Surely, he thought, the love of this brave old hunter for his daughter and for his gentle mistress was not in vain. It would lift the wandering spirit out of the dark shadow it had dreaded.

Smedley's task was done now, and a great weariness seized upon his spirit as he plunged into the trackless woods.

When he reached the edge there was no trace of his horse, and slowly he climbed the mountain and went over the wide plateau to the Sabi valley.

On the fifth day he passed into a rugged country, covered with bush along the base of the hills, but with the rounded summits rising bare. In the ledges and on sharp ridges were many huts, like beehives. There was no life in the villages, but in the morning when he was yet approaching them he had heard a great shout, and in the night there came a sound of wailing from the rocks.

He climbed up over a mass of loose stones, and at last reached a village. A light gleamed in a large hut, and he looked in.

At sight of his pale face the people within—all women and girls—bowed their heads to the ground in fear.

In the middle of the hut was the body of a man. The

face was toward him, and he recognized the chief Siluana.

In the morning he learnt that the chief had been left by the Matabeli, and that he had taken refuge in the hills from the Gasa Zulus, fighting many battles, but falling at last to a bullet.

After many dangers Smedley reached the Transvaal and spent a pleasant rest with Drury and his blue-eyed bride, then went on to England.

He found his way to the Devon vicarage, and stood hesitating at the gate, when over the lawn there came to him slowly a lovely girl, no longer pale or sad, and they met in silence, looking long into eyes that spoke to each of love and devotion.

THE END.

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Maud Muller

"It Might Have Been."

Her Joy was Duty
And Love was Law.

MAUD MULLER.

MAUD MULLER, on a summer's day, raked the meadow sweet with hay.
 Beneath her torn hat glowed the wealth of simple beauty and rustic health.
 Singing, she wrought, and her merry glee the mock-bird echoed from his tree.
 But when she glanced to the far-off town, white from its hill-slope looking down,
 The sweet song died, and a vague unrest and a nameless longing filled her breast,—
 A wish, that she hardly dare to own, for something better than she had known.
 The Judge rode slowly down the lane, smoothing his horse's chestnut mane.
 He drew his bridle in the shade of the apple-trees to greet the maid,
 And asked a draught from the spring that flowed through the meadow across the road.
 She stooped where the cool spring bubbled up, and filled for him her small tin cup,
 And blushed as she gave it, looking down on her feet so bare, and her tattered gown.
 "Thanks!" said the Judge; "a sweeter draught from a fairer hand was never quaffed."
 He spoke of the grass and flowers and trees, of the singing birds and the humming bees;
 Then talked of the haying, and wondered whether the cloud in the west would bring foul
 And Maud forgot her brier-torn gown, and her graceful ankles bare and brown [weather.
 And listened, while a pleased surprise looked from her long-lashed hazel eyes.
 At last, like one who for delay seeks a vain excuse, he rode away.
 Maud Muller looked and sighed: "Ah me! That I the Judge's bride might be!
 "He would dress me up in silks so fine, and praise and toast me at his wine.
 "My father should wear a broadcloth coat; my brother should sail a painted boat.
 "I'd dress my mother so grand and gay, and the baby should have a new toy each day.
 "And I'd feed the hungry and clothe the poor, and all should bless me who left our door."
 The Judge looked back as he climbed the hill, and saw Maud Muller standing still.
 "A form more fair, a face more sweet, ne'er hath it been my lot to meet.
 "And her modest answer and graceful air show her wise and good as she is fair.
 "Would she were mine, and I to-day, like her, a harvester of hay;
 "No doubtful balance of rights and wrongs, nor weary lawyers with endless tongues,
 "But low of cattle and song of birds, and health and quiet and loving words."
 But he thought of his sisters proud and cold, and his mother vain of her rank and gold.
 So, closing his heart the Judge rode on and Maud was left in the field alone.
 But the lawyers smiled that afternoon, when he hummed in Court an old love tune;
 And the young girl mused beside the well till the rain on the unraked clover fell.
 He wedded a wife of richest dower, who lived for fashion, as he for power.
 Yet oft, in his marble hearth's bright glow, he watched a picture come and go;
 And sweet Maud Muller's hazel eyes looked out in their innocent surprise.
 Oft, when the wine in his glass was red, he longed for the wayside well instead;
 And closed his eyes on his garnished rooms to dream of meadows and clover-blossoms.
 And the proud man sighed, with a secret pain, "Ah, that I was free again!
 "Free as when I rode that day, where the barefoot maiden raked her hay."
 She wedded a man unlearned and poor, and many children played round her door.
 But care and sorrow, and childbirth pain, left their traces on heart and brain.
 And oft, when the summer sun shone hot on the new-mown hay in the meadow lot,
 And she heard the little spring brook fall over the road side, through the wail,
 In the shade of the apple-tree again she saw a rider draw his rein.
 And, gazing down with timid grace, she felt his pleased eyes read her face.
 Sometimes her narrow kitchen walls stretched away into stately halls;
 The weary wheel to a spinnet turned, the tallow candle an astral burned,
 And for him who sat by the chimney lug, dozing and grumbling o'er pipe and mug,
 A manly form at her side she saw, and joy was duty and love was law.
 Then she took up her burden of life again, saying only, "It might have been."
 Alas for maiden, alas for Judge, for rich repiner and household drudge!
 God pity them both! and pity us all, who vainly the dreams of youth recall.
 For of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: "It might have been."
 Ah, well! for us all some sweet hope lies deeply buried from human eyes;
 And, in the hereafter, angels may roll the stone from its grave away!

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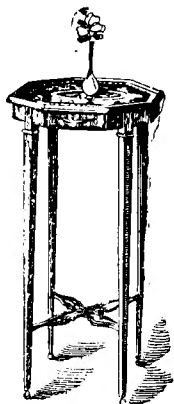
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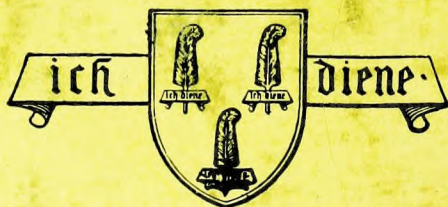


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